

THE LONE HAND. By BARRY PAIN.

In the following story, which will be completed in three instalments, the well-known author relates the singular adventures which befel a brave and high-spirited girl who came up to London to make a living for herself, with no other aid than that of her own mother-wit.

For those—and they are many—who seek in fiction a wholesome relaxation from the cares of life, there will be found in these adventures a light and pleasant form of entertainment—a series of scenes, ranging from the real to the fantastic, taken from the Great Comedy of Life.

I.—STRANDED.



It is quite possible to love a person whom one does not respect—of whom one even disapproves. I loved my father, but I certainly did not respect him. He did not even respect himself.

When he married my mother, much against the wishes of his family, my grandfather bought him an annuity of two hundred a year, and desired to have nothing more to do with him. My mother died when I was quite a little girl, but I have a vivid recollection that she was just about as helpless as my father. In times of financial crisis—and, thanks to my father, these were very frequent—the two would sit staring at one another over the fire, and say that this was the beginning of the end, or exhort each other to hope and courage, but never, by any chance, take any practical way of dealing with the situation. On these gloomy occasions my father generally made a will. I do not think he, at any time, had anything to leave us worth mentioning, but the sonorous phrases and the feeling that he was doing something business-like seemed to give him a melancholy satisfaction. I have the last will that he made before me now. It begins: "I, Bernard Castel, being of sound mind and understanding, and at peace with God and man, do hereby give and bequeath all my real and personal estate, of whatsoever kind, to my only beloved daughter, Wilhelmina." There followed directions as to the ways of disposing of this estate, supposing it should exceed twenty-five thousand pounds at the time of his death, and further directions if it should exceed fifty thousand. At that time we were as usual skating on the very edge of bankruptcy. I remember my father returned in triumph from dealing with the local tradesman, who was his principal creditor. "I have done it, Wilhelmina," he said. "And I doubt if any other man

in the world could have done it. Another coat of paint and there would have been a collision."

I suppose he really loved me. He often told me, especially when a financial crisis was at its worst, that I was all he had in the world. But he never insured his life, and never made any provision for me after his death. After all, I believe that a father and a girl of sixteen, even if they happen to be gentlefolks, can live in the country on two hundred a year, and even put by a few pounds for insurance. The trouble was that my father could not let his income alone. Every quarter-day brought some new scheme, generally of a wildly speculative and gambling character. And before next quarter-day we were terribly hard up. At first my father confided these schemes to me, but I am quite practical, and I hated them, and told him so. Then he kept his schemes to himself, merely observing, in the deepest despondency when the bottom had dropped out of them: "Wilhelmina, I fear that I have made a fool of myself again." He sometimes earned a little money by writing, and I think might have earned more. He wrote stories of the most extreme sentimentality, and of the most aggressively moral character; and one of the Sunday magazines used to publish them. He and I have screamed over them many a time. Shortly after one quarter-day he went down to a land auction in Essex and bought a small plot for ten pounds. When I remonstrated, he said feebly that an excellent free luncheon had been provided for all who attended the sale, and that, after all, much money had been made by poultry farming. I asked him if either he or I knew one single fact about poultry, except that they never laid as many eggs as one expected. He admitted it, and in a rare fit of remorse sat down at once and wrote a story about a girl with consumption which brought him in nearly enough to cover the difference between the price he had paid for the land and the price he sold it for a few days later.

He was popular, as most extravagant men with a sense of humour are, but his sense of humour had a blind point. He could never see that any of his wild-cat business was utterly ridiculous, or understand why sometimes in the middle of our deepest distress I could not help laughing at him. Yet he did not take his literary work seriously at all, and it used to be my chief amusement to get him to read out his own stories, with his own parenthetical comments. His popularity certainly served him at some of the times of crisis, and made his creditors lenient with him. During his last illness several people to whom he owed money, and had owed money for a long time, sent him presents. I thought it was rather touching. We were living then at a village called Castel-on-Weld, and we lived there simply and solely because my father happened to come upon the name in an old Bradshaw, and thought that it would be nice and hereditary to be Bernard Castel, Esq., of Castel-on-Weld. I am not aware that any of his ancestors had ever lived within a hundred miles of the place.

On the day after the funeral I got the only letter I ever received from my grandfather. It did not pretend to any grief over the dead, and it informed me, in a courteously acidulated way, that he did not wish to see

me and that I had nothing to expect from him. But it enclosed a cheque for two hundred pounds, to cover present expenses and until I was able to get work.

Now, I think a really fine and high-spirited girl out of a penny book would have torn that cheque in half and sent it back to him with a few dignified words. But I did not see why my butcher and baker and candlestick-maker should be called upon to finance my exhibition of a proud and imperious nature. That was what it would have come to, for we owed money to the butcher and the baker, and I do not doubt we should have owed it to the candlestick-maker as well but for the fact that there was no candlestick-maker in the village. So I wrote: "Dear Grandpapa,—Thanks very much for the two hundred pounds, which will be most useful, but you don't seem to know how to write a letter to a girl who has just lost her father. I sha'n't bother you.—Your affectionate granddaughter, WILHELMINA."

Then the parson and the doctor came round, and they were two good men. The doctor said that medical etiquette did not permit him to make any charge to an orphan girl, and that if he took my money he would be hounded out of the profession, and quite properly. But I told him that I thought he was lying, and made him take the money. As it was, he had given us any amount of his care and time and charged about half nothing for it. He was not a rich man, either. The parson said that his wife wanted someone to act as a companion and to assist in looking after the little girls. I thanked him very much, but I said that I believed, if she thought it over, she would find that she didn't. They gave me lots of good advice, and when I sold all the furniture and effects, they bid frantically against one another for the six bottles of distinctly inferior sherry which at that time constituted our entire cellar. Other friends did similar acts of kindness at the sale. I had meant it to be a perfectly genuine sale, but all the time I felt that I was passing round the hat. I do not think the auctioneer has ever forgotten it. The way that sherry, with the maker's name giving it away on every bottle, fetched the price of a vintage Château d'Yquem of great age must have made an indelible impression.

I had thought it all out. I really did not want to take from these good people what was given in the merest charity. I was not, as a matter of fact, very intimate with any of them. I did not want to be a companion, even if the parson's wife had had any sort of use for a companion. I had quite clearly made up my mind that there was no work in the world that I should be ashamed to do, if I could do it; but that I would not take up anything which could not possibly lead to anything. Now, nearly every feminine occupation recommended to the distressed, but untrained, gentlewoman is a *cul-de-sac*, and when you get over the wall at the end of the *cul-de-sac* you are in the workhouse. I had also decided that I must get out of Castel-on-Weld, because things did not happen there, and in consequence I could not take advantage of things happening. I determined to go to London.

Beyond the general principles which I have indicated I had no clear idea of what I was going to do, but I had got new clothes, no debts, and

about seventy-five pounds in cash. I think I was well educated, though rather in a general and erratic way. My father, who had never been in France in his life, spoke the most idiomatic and even the most argotic French, with the vilest of accents. He infinitely preferred French fiction to English, and I will do him the justice to say that he generally remembered to lock it up. It is possible that with my knowledge of French, music, and literature I might have become a governess, but to become a governess is to walk deliberately into the *cul-de-sac*. I had vague ideas that I should like to get into some kind of business, and by cleverness and practicality and temperance and early rising, and the rest of the bag-of-tricks, worm my way slowly upwards until I was a manageress and indispensable. All the time I should be saving money, and should then be ready to start for myself. I had not decided what the business was to be; once in London I should have time to look about me.

I had also thought of marriage. Even if I had not thought of it, the fact that the doctor proposed to me twice would have reminded me of it. I was pretty enough, and though the idea of falling in love never occurred to me, I thought that I might marry rather well one day. That was an additional reason for leaving Castel-on-Weld. I had already twice refused the only marriageable man in the neighbourhood. But in any case I was only eighteen, and I did not mean to marry for some time to come.

I was going to play a lone hand, and the honest truth is that I rather enjoyed the prospect. I was going to London, a place where things happen, and I was going to do what I wanted in the way I wanted. And perhaps I should starve, and perhaps I should have fun. So one morning I got into a third-class railway carriage, and an old woman talked to me at length about her somewhat unseemly physical infirmities. I hope I was sympathetic, but my mind was already in London, looking out for the possibility of adventure.

I did not have to wait long in London to discover that strange things happen there. The first thing that I noticed on my arrival at Charing Cross was that on the platform, under the clock, there were some fifteen girls, all of whom bore the closest possible physical resemblance to myself. We might all have been sisters.

II.—MR. NATHAN GOULD.

It was something of a surprise.

If on my arrival in London I had found waiting on the platform at Charing Cross one girl of the same height as myself, the same colour of hair, the same type of face, and the same style of clothes, I might have thought it merely a coincidence. But here were fifteen girls, all—so far as I could see—exactly similar. They were not in groups, but scattered about the platform under the clock. They never spoke to one another, but it struck me that they looked at one another curiously and with something like veiled hostility. I saw the same expression on their faces, whenever one of them happened to pass me. I could not imagine what it meant, and I wanted to find out. I sent a porter to the cloak-room with

my belongings, and stood against the bookstall waiting events. It was then two minutes to one.

At one o'clock precisely a man of about thirty-five, in a light overcoat, with a folded newspaper in his hand, walked rapidly into the station and stood still, looking about him. His personal appearance was not in his favour. He wore too much jewellery, and the expression on his face was one of furtive spite. One of the girls who were waiting walked close past him very slowly. He looked at her intently, but made no sign, and she then passed out of the station. A second girl did the same thing, except that she lingered at a little distance from him. A third was just approaching, when he came rapidly forward to me and raised his hat.

"I think," he said in a slightly foreign accent, "I am right in presuming that you are here in response to my advertisement in this morning's *Mail*."

"No," I said, "I have seen no advertisement. I don't know you, and don't understand why you should speak to me."

"I hope," he said, "you will give me an opportunity of explaining. It can do you no harm, and may be very profitable to you. It is a matter of life and death, or I would not trouble you. I assure you that I mean no disrespect whatever."

By his tone and manner it was perfectly evident that he was not talking to me merely because I was a pretty girl. He was the kind of man whom anyone would distrust at sight, but of whom no one could have been afraid. I was not in the least afraid. I shrugged my shoulders.

"This is wildly unusual," I said, "and I don't like it. You may begin your explanations. If at any moment I think them at all unsatisfactory I shall send you away. Begin by showing me the advertisement."

He handed me the paper in his hand with the advertisement marked, and I read as follows: "If the lady of eighteen, with dark hair and blue eyes, pale complexion, good-looking, height five-foot-seven, will be on the platform of Charing Cross, under the clock, at one p.m. precisely this morning, the man in the light overcoat, with the folded newspaper, will meet her there, and liberally reward her services."

"Well?" I said.

"The advertisement was not addressed to any particular lady. I merely wanted to find one who would bear a close resemblance to my half-sister, who died about a month ago. My mother is seriously ill, and the death of my half-sister, to whom she was devoted, has been kept from her. If she knew of that death there is no doubt that she would succumb at once. She has been told that my half-sister is away in the country, but she has begun to suspect, and we have had to promise to produce her. You are exactly like her, you have the same tone of voice, you spoke to me exactly as she would have spoken if a stranger had addressed her. The impersonation will be a very easy one; you will have to be in the same room with my mother for a few moments, and will have little to say. The room will not be brightly lit, and the doctor would not permit any but the briefest interview. You will be prolonging her life for a few days, at the best I fear it cannot be for more than that, and you will remove

a load of terrible suffering from her mind. For this I am ready to pay you five pounds now and one pound for every day that you remain at my house. My name is Gould—Mr. Nathan Gould. Here is my card."

The card bore an address in Wilbraham-square, Bloomsbury. I thought the matter over for a few seconds. One can do a great deal of thinking in a few seconds. "Mr. Gould," I said, "if I believed your story entirely I would do what you want for nothing. I neither believe it nor disbelieve it entirely. I have the impression that you are keeping something back."

"Not intentionally. I explained myself as quickly and briefly as possible, but I am ready to answer any questions."

"Possibly I am not in a position to ask the questions which would be material." At this I thought he winced slightly. "I consider that I take a great risk, and I do not take a great risk unless the consideration is proportionately great. If you will pay me fifty pounds in cash and five pounds for every day that I remain in your house I will come. I have only just arrived in London, have no friends here, and was on the point of going to an hotel. If you accept my terms I can come at once. If not, there is no more to be said."

He did not seem much surprised. "Is that your last word?" he said.

"It is."

"Very well. You shall have my cheque for fifty pounds as soon as we reach my house, and the rest of the money will be paid you day by day."

"That will not do," I said. "We will drive now to your bank, and you will draw fifty pounds in notes or gold. We shall then go on to my bank, where I shall deposit the money. After that I am at your service."

"You are a business-like woman," he said. "It is queer to be distrusted when one is really perfectly honest, but it shall be as you wish. If you will come with me I will call a cab."

"You will call two," I said. "A four-wheeler for myself and my luggage, and a hansom for yourself."

My programme was punctually carried out. As it happened, we both banked in Lombard-street, and it was not long before that part of the business was concluded, and we had arrived at the house in Wilbraham-square. It was a good Georgian house, and looked well kept. Gould paid the cabmen and introduced his latch-key.

"No," I said, "ring. I prefer it." I wanted particularly to see who would answer the door. An extremely commonplace and honest-looking parlourmaid answered it. When she saw me she staggered back, aghast.

"That's all right, Annie," said Mr. Gould reassuringly. "The resemblance is striking, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," said the maid. "It took me very much by surprise."

"All right upstairs?" asked Gould.

"I believe so. The doctor is just leaving."

By this time the man had brought my luggage into the hall. At the

same moment a grey-headed old gentleman came down the stairs, slipping a stethoscope into his side-pocket. He also seemed startled at seeing me.

I trusted that old gentleman, and I trusted the maid who had opened the door, but I did not trust Mr. Nathan Gould a bit. At this moment his air was far more that of a man who has recently pulled off a clever financial coup than of a son who has succeeded in saving a mother to whom he is devoted from a great sorrow. Gould went forward to the doctor at once.

"How is she?" he asked eagerly.

"No change," said the doctor. He looked across at me. "Really," he said, "the resemblance is astounding."

Gould brought him up to me. "This is our doctor," he said, "Dr. Wentworth." Gould hesitated. I had not given him my name.

"I am Miss Tower," I said.

The doctor bowed. "May I ask," I said, "if you have been attending Mrs. Gould for some time?"

"Certainly," he said; "for the last five years."

"I should like very much to speak with you alone for a few minutes. Have you the time, and would you be so very kind as to do this for me?"

The doctor looked inquiringly at Gould. Gould was furious. He knew, of course, that I was about to ask for his character. But he restrained himself. "Miss Tower," he said, with a touch of bitterness, "has already made it quite clear to me that she must have her own way. I believe there is no one in the drawing-room." The doctor held open the door for me.

"I will give you as many minutes as you want, with pleasure," he said.

I gave him my story as briefly as I could, and told him all that had passed between Mr. Gould and myself. "I am going to be quite frank," I went on. "I do not trust the man in the least. I do not believe he has one atom of love or respect for his mother."

"He has not," said the doctor.

"Why, then, does he want this impersonation?"

"What he has told you is true. Mrs. Gould is very ill. There are various complications, but it is the heart which we have to fear principally. It is impossible to cure her, but I confidently believe that by coming here you will prolong her life and make her last days much happier. As to Mr. Gould's motives, I have perhaps no right to speak. He has not confided in me. I will only give you the facts. Mrs. Gould is one of two sisters, of equal fortune, and bitterly jealous of one another. The elder sister died in her seventy-fourth year. She did not wish Mrs. Gould to have any advantage over her, and left her money to accumulate until Mrs. Gould's seventy-third birthday, when Mrs. Gould comes into it. She was a cranky old woman, and did not like the idea of her sister having any more money than she had. Mrs. Gould is a wealthy woman now, and on her seventy-third birthday, which will be in a few days' time, will be twice as wealthy. If she does not live till her seventy-third

birthday the whole of her sister's money goes to the London Hospital. Do you see ? "

"Yes," I said, "I see. She has doubtlessly left her money to her son, and in the event of her surviving until her seventy-third birthday he will profit."

"Precisely. Her entire estate is left equally between Mr. Gould and his half-sister, and in the event of the death of either the whole goes to the survivor. That is the situation in a nutshell."

"Then what have I to fear ? "

"Nothing at all, until after that seventy-third birthday."

"I see," I said meditatively. I could imagine that after that date Mr. Gould's filial affection might undergo some remarkable changes.

The doctor gave me some useful information about the half-sister and explained to me exactly what I was to do when I was admitted to his patient's room. He also gave me his address. "You may find that useful in a week's time," he said.

My luggage had already been taken up and the maid showed me the way to my room. On the stairs we met Mr. Gould. "It is all right," he said in a low voice ; "I have just come from my mother's room. She is overjoyed. You will see her this evening." He paused and added, "And have you heard the worst of me ? "

"Not yet," I said. "That will come."

Then he guessed how much I knew, and hated me almost as much as I hated him.

The maid who was unpacking for me asked me if I would lunch downstairs with Mr. Gould or if I preferred to lunch in my own room. It is always well to get to know one's enemy, and I did not hesitate. A few minutes later I was sitting down to lunch alone with a man whom two hours before I had never seen in my life, and of whom I now knew very little, and nothing which was not dead against him.

He was really very clever. He hardly spoke of his mother at all, he was quiet in his manner, and showed himself most attentive to my personal comfort. I was not to consider myself a prisoner at all. I could have the brougham that afternoon and go anywhere I liked. If it was convenient to me to be back at six o'clock, that would be the best time for me to see his mother. But if not, some other arrangement might be made. Did I like the room that had been given me ? If not, it could be changed. There was another little room just opposite to it in the same passage, which was being got ready to serve as a private sitting-room for me.

I thanked him and said I was not going out. Turning the conversation away from myself, I made him talk to me about his half-sister. He talked about her in the most easy and matter-of-fact way. I do not suppose he ever cared for her or for anybody except himself. All the same, the information that I got as to minute points of her personal appearance and her manner of speaking was very useful.

At six o'clock I was quite ready. Mr. Gould now seemed a little nervous and excited. He kept on giving me fragments of stupid advice

and telling me things that he had told me before. The interview was to be a very short one, and the doctor and the nurse were both in the dimly lit room when I entered it, though they stood at some distance from the bed. On the bed lay the dying woman—a handsome old Jewess, with whity-yellow skin of one even tint, colourless lips, and blazing eyes. I went straight up to the bed and took her claw of a hand and bent over her and kissed her. She spoke in a very low voice, and I just caught the words, "Thought I'd lost you."

"No," I said, "I'm here, and I will not leave you again until you get better."

Her eyes closed and opened again and fixed themselves on me. "Pray for me," she said.

Still holding her hand I dropped down on my knees by her bedside. My thoughts flew frantically in unlikely directions. I remembered my own mother sitting before the fire and saying with helpless solemnity that it was the beginning of the end. I was not quite sure where I had put my watch-key, and puzzled about it. I recalled vividly a fat old woman who had travelled up in the same compartment with me, and I wondered where she had gone. And all the time I was holding the old woman's hand and trying to pray, and hearing the clock on the mantelpiece tick, as it seemed to me, constantly quicker and quicker.

Presently the doctor touched me on the shoulder. I opened my eyes and saw that the old woman had fallen asleep. I released her hand gently, and slipped out of the room. When I got outside I was shaking like a leaf, and there was Mr. Gould full of eager questions. I answered him as well as I could. He was delighted.

"Now," I said, "let me go to my own rooms for the rest of the day."

He looked at me curiously. "Why," he said, "you seem upset. I suppose you are not as used to it as we are. You ought to have a brandy and soda. Let me get it for you."

I refused that, went off to my own room, lay down on the bed, and began to cry. I had not the faintest idea what I was crying about. It was all so strange and horrible. But soon I sat up and bullied myself. I could see that there might be much to do which would want all my sense and none of my emotion. I dined in my own room, and with my dinner there was brought to me a letter from Mr. Gould, thanking me for my kindness, and enclosing a five-pound note.

The next two days passed quietly enough. I now saw the old woman two or three times a day. The third day was the day before the birthday. In the afternoon Mrs. Gould, who had been getting much better, became rapidly worse, fainted, and was unconscious for quite a long time. Gould made a fool of himself. He whipped the doctor off into the dining-room, and talked so loudly that I could hear in the drawing-room. "Look here, doctor," he said, "you must keep her alive for another nine hours. You can do it if you like, you know. Use more stimulants. You want to flog that heart. Keep it going somehow. Were you trying oxygen?"

"Mr. Gould," said the doctor, "you know that your mother refuses to see any other doctor, and that any attempt to force one upon her would

certainly be fatal. Otherwise I should have thrown up this case before. As it is, I am not going to enter into any consultation with yourself or any other ignorant and unqualified person. And it would help me to keep my temper, and would therefore facilitate my work, if I had no interviews with you of any kind. Send your inquiries through the servant."

The doctor came out and shut the door. He looked into the drawing-room for a moment. "Miss Tower," he said, "if Mrs. Gould lives until after twelve to-night, look out."

"I had meant to," I said.

Then he went up to his patient.

At twelve that night Mrs. Gould was alive and sleeping peacefully. As soon as Mr. Gould had heard this glad news he went up to bed. That night, for the first time, I had not received my fee. At breakfast next morning he was distinctly disrespectful in his manner. "Look here," he said, "the best of friends must part. You've done all I wanted, and there is no doubt my mother will get on all right without you now. She has got rid of the idea that my half-sister is dead, and that was the main point. I've told them to pack your things, and as soon as you're ready to go you shall have that last fiver you managed to screw out of me. You've been paid a sight too well, but I'm a man of my word."

"I'm not going," I said.

"Not going? Don't talk in that silly way. You'll have to go. I can starve you out—I can throw you out by force if you like. Still, I don't want a scene. I suppose I must make it two fivers instead of one. That's what you're after."

I took out the slip of paper on which Dr. Wentworth had written down his address for me. "It's quite true," I said. "You may have my things packed and put on a cab and may ask me to leave the house. If I do so, that will be the address to which the cabman will drive, and the consequences are likely to be serious for you."

He raved and abused like a drunken cad for a few moments, and then went out of the room, and a moment later out of the house.

At eleven that morning Mrs. Gould died suddenly in my arms. It was a quick and painless ending. A telegram was sent to Mr. Gould's office in the City, and the reply came back that he was not there. Dr. Wentworth came down to the drawing-room with me and seemed slightly hesitating. "Excuse me," he said, "for asking the question, but have you any friends in London?"

"None," I said.

"And have you any plans?"

"None; except to leave this place immediately. I shall see what happens. It was through seeing what happened that I came here. At any rate, I'm not going to take on any of the underpaid work leading to nothing of which women seem to be so fond."

"I don't quite like this," he said. "I rather wish you'd go and talk things over with my wife. But you won't, and, after all, I don't know that it would do much good. You're playing a lone hand and you rather like it, and you can take care of yourself."

I talked to him a little longer, and then my cab came. As I drove away I saw Mr. Gould approaching the house. He was not helpless, but he was a little more than half-drunk. I wondered for what act he had been trying to find the courage.

III.—THE MAN OF MEANS.

My principal feeling on leaving Mr. Gould's house was one of extreme weariness. The emotions wear one out more than work does. I had been living idly and even luxuriously, but I was more tired than I used to be in the days when I lived with my father, and during some financial or domestic crisis the whole of the housework fell to my lot. I had Mr. Gould's five-pound notes in my pocket, and I drove to a good hotel. I stopped there for three days, and I think spent most of my time in bed and asleep. Then I said to myself, "Wilhelmina, this will not do. You are spending too much, and you are earning nothing, and you are not even looking about you." So I left my good hotel, and went to a cheap boarding-house. And on the second night that I was there a young Hindoo proposed marriage to me. Also the cooking was very bad. So I left.

While I was there I had calculated that I had enough money to furnish a very small flat, and to live for very nearly a year. I found my flat in a Brompton back street. It was not one of the mansions with lifts and liveried porters and electric light, and lots of white paint. It was a little £30 house which had been ingeniously converted into three flats. One was in the basement, and you entered it down the area steps, and paid seven shillings a week when you got there. The ground-floor flat was eight shillings, and the upstairs flat seven-and-six. I went in for luxury and eight shillings. I had a separate entrance, and when I shut my front door I was alone in my own little world. The world contained a sitting-room, bedroom, and kitchen, and was extremely dirty and horrible until I set to work on it. I need not say that I spent more money than I had intended on cleaning, furnishing, and decorating. Everybody does that. As an economy and a punishment I did everything for myself. The flat above me was occupied by a horse-keeper from one of the 'bus-yards and his wife. The wife did a little intermittent cheap dress-making. They both drank, used improper language, and occasionally flung paraffin lamps at one another. The flat below had been occupied by an old man who lived alone, and had got tired of it and died. I met his dead body coming up those area steps as I moved in. After that the flat remained untenanted. Every Saturday a knowing-looking young man with a pencil behind his ear and an account-book and a black bag called for the eight shillings. And as long as you paid that nobody cared who you were, or what you did, or why you did it. I rather liked that.

When I was comfortably installed I began to think things out. I decided at first to go in for the gratitude of the aged. You know the kind of thing. You render the old gentleman or old lady some slight service in a 'bus or railway carriage, and a month later they die and leave you all their money. I think I was right in believing in the gratitude of the aged. Compared with the young they are very grateful. But I fancy they have a great tendency to have wives and children or other near relations, and

to abstain from leaving their money to the entire stranger who has opened the carriage-door for them. One day in Chancery-lane a horse in a hansom cab came down rather excessively, and a very aged solicitor shot out in a miscellaneous heap into the middle of the road. I helped him up, saved his hat from the very jaws of an omnibus, so to speak, and said I was sorry for him. He did not even ask for my name and address, and at the moment of going to press I have heard nothing further from him. The other old people to whom I was able to offer some slight service seemed to think that a few words of warm thanks would be all I required. I began to disbelieve in the familiar stories of the wills of the wealthy.

And then I embarked on a business which I am afraid must prove conclusively that I was a daughter of my father, for it was just the mad, wild-cat kind of thing that he would certainly have embarked on himself, if he had ever thought of it. Briefly, I put an advertisement in one of the most popular of the Sunday papers, and also in the *Morning Post*, addressed to all who were unhappy in love: "I know the heart, and I know the world," was the way I began. I pointed out cunningly that however much one might need advice in these matters, there was always a feeling of embarrassment in consulting anyone who knew you. The only person in whom one could confide was the entire stranger. I pointed out, moreover, that real names and addresses need never be given to me. I only required to know the facts, and I would send a letter of advice specially written for each case for the sum of half a crown. Their letters were to be directed to "Irma," and I gave the address of a little newsagent who took in letters.

I ran this business for about two months. It began slowly, but after the first fortnight I really had as much as I could do. I always asked the people to whom I sent letters to recommend me to their friends, and in many cases I know that they did so. I gave the best advice that I could, and I had a small shilling book on the marriage laws which I found very useful. Not one couple in a hundred that want to get married really know how it may or may not be done. My clients were chiefly women, and I have grave doubts as to the seriousness of some of the few men who applied to me. But I did not mind in the least so long as their postal-orders were enclosed. The women seemed to belong almost exclusively to two sets—domestic servants and foolish people in smart society. The middle-class would have nothing to do with me, and I am not sure, although I always gave the best advice I could, that the middle-class was not right. Only once or twice in the curious confessions that were poured out on me did I come upon anything that I should have called real romance. There was plenty of vanity, there was plenty of sentimentality, and there was a good deal of acute money-grubbing. It was really interesting work, though it kept me a great deal indoors, and I am not sure even now that it was quite honest.

At the end of the first month some blessed young man, whom I am glad to have this opportunity of thanking, wrote a short and chaffing article about my advertisement. For days after this I was simply inundated with letters, and I had to send out postcards to my clients

explaining that, owing to the pressure of business, my letters of advice to them would probably be delayed for some days. Among those letters was one bearing the address of a house in Berkeley-square, which was so extraordinary that I give it in full. It was one of the few letters that I received from men :

"Dear Madam,—I have seen your advertisement and also the short article upon it in the *Daily Courier*, and my own case is so curious that I have decided to address you. I enclose a postal-order for half a crown as required ; but I am a man of means, and in the event of your being able to assist me I shall, as you will see, propose a more adequate remuneration. I have been a great traveller and sportsman, and you may possibly have come upon my recent work on 'Sport in Thibet.' I have now returned to England and am anxious to marry. But I am prevented by a strange psychological characteristic of my own.

"The fact, put briefly, is that I cannot stand fear. Any evidence of timidity in a man inspires me with rage, and in a woman with disgust. However attractive she may be, at the slightest sign that she fears me, love vanishes completely. I cannot stand her, I cannot bear to be with her. This is the more unfortunate because I am by nature a dominant person. I have been told that my eyes are mesmeric. I do not believe in this nonsense, but certainly women seem to find it difficult to meet my gaze fairly and squarely. I have a somewhat hasty temper, and nothing exasperates it more than the attempt to smooth it down, accompanied, as it always is, by fear of what I may do next. I want a woman who does not care one straw what I do next—who will be as absolutely free from every form of cowardice, physical or moral, as I am myself. The mother of my children must not be a coward.

"I am thirty-seven years of age, wealthy, and not, I believe, much uglier than other men, and I cannot find the woman that I require. Possibly, among the many cases which must have been brought to your notice, you will have come across some such woman. If so, and if you will arrange a meeting between her and me, I will pay you the sum of one hundred pounds, provided, of course, that I am satisfied on the question of her courage. If, though satisfied on this point, I do not wish to marry her, I will pay her also the sum of one hundred pounds for the trouble which I have given her. She must, of course, not be older than I am myself, and I confess that good looks are a great consideration with me. Social standing is of no importance whatever. I do not allow popular prejudices to interfere with my actions, even when they are of the least importance, and far less do I admit of such interference in my choice of a wife.—I am, my dear Madam, faithfully yours, —."

I do not give his signature. It is a name that you will find in Debrett, though I did not look it up at the time. That letter gave me a great deal to think over. There was a queer mixture of bragging and modesty about it. Yet, I asked myself, how could he give me the facts which it was necessary for me to know without appearing to brag ? The commission of one hundred pounds was certainly tempting, but none of my correspondents occurred to me as being likely to meet his require-

ments, even if they had not had their own affairs on their hands. Fear is a feminine quality. Women have a right to it; without being cowardly, they may be able to realise a danger and they may have delicate nerves. Nor can I see that they are any the worse for it. After a little reflection I wrote to say that I believed I should be able to assist him if he could wait for about a fortnight. And I had a reply on the following day to say that he would wait with pleasure.

I was not, decidedly not, thirty-seven, and I was as pretty as I thought he had any right to expect. I was not the creature of steel that he required, but none the less my nerves were in fairly good order, and I thought that I could get through, at any rate, any of the preliminary tests to which he might subject me. Two hundred pounds is better than one hundred. Possibly I might marry this man. I did not know and did not want to marry anybody. But he might take his chance, and, in case of failure, fall in line with the doctor at Castel-on-Weld and the young Hindoo in the boarding-house. It is wonderful how many excuses one can find for an action which brings in two hundred pounds.

At the end of the fortnight I wrote and gave him an appointment for the afternoon of two days later, outside the Stores in Victoria-street, when I said that the young lady whom I had selected as likely to meet his requirements would meet him. I suggested that there should be some sign by which he might be known. Next day I received a telegram in these words: "I shall come dashing up. The red rose is, and always has been, my sign."

I thought over that telegram for a long time, and I did not quite like it. It was altogether too queer. But I meant to see the thing through. After all, I had given him no sign by which he could recognise me, and I could always back out at the last moment if I thought it necessary. So, at the time appointed, which was at three in the afternoon, I was in Victoria-street, at some little distance from the Stores, waiting to see what might happen.

What actually happened was rather grotesque. A four-wheeled cab drove up, and an old gentleman got out. He wore a red rose in his buttonhole and another in his hat. He took four rose-bushes in pots from the interior of the cab and placed them on the pavement, dived back into his cab once more, and came out with a large florist's box. This was packed with red roses, which he proceeded to scatter broadcast. His cabman laughed till he nearly fell off the box, and a large crowd quickly gathered round. The crowd seemed to annoy the old gentleman. I heard him shouting in a querulous voice, "I am here for a special purpose. Kindly go away. I require this street for the afternoon." A small boy knocked over one of the little rose-bushes, and this exasperated the old gentleman still further. In a moment he had whipped a revolver out of his pocket, and began firing it up into the air in an indiscriminate manner. The police very promptly got him. And I said nothing to anybody and went home.

Naturally the case was reported in all the papers. The old man had been strange in his manner for some time, but his relations had not

apprehended anything serious. This afternoon he had been particularly enraged because he could not get a four-wheeler, and he was too nervous to ride in hansoms.

I never heard any more of the case, but it gave me a dislike of the business which I was engaged upon, and the dislike was increased a few days later. I was looking out of my windows when I saw a woman of common appearance give an almost imperceptible nod to a passing policeman. She then came on to my flat and knocked. I let her in.

"You are the lady who advertises as 'Irma,'" she said.

"I am. How did you know that I lived here?"

"They told me at the tobacconist's where your letters are sent. Now I want you to give me some help. I have got the money here and I can pay well."

"What is it you want?" I asked.

"Well, I'm told that you are a wise woman, and know the future. A man, rather younger than myself, has every appearance of being attracted by me, but I don't know whether he means anything serious or not. I thought perhaps you'd look at my hand and tell me what was destined."

I sent her away at once. It was a police trap, of course. When you receive many letters, containing many postal-orders, and you cash those orders all at one office, I suppose the police become interested. It seemed degrading, and I hated it. Also I had reflected that this was not really work that would lead to anything.

I sat down there and then and wrote letters withdrawing the "Irma" advertisements. My total profit, after all expenses were paid, amounted to a little over twenty pounds.

(To be continued.)



HIS ONLY DREAD.

He crossed the ocean many times
Without a thought of fear;
He crossed the rugged Alpine range,
He crossed the desert drear;
He crossed the crowded, busy Strand,
Nor trembled for his life;
And yet he does not dare to cross
His little brown-eyed wife.

THE LONE HAND. By BARRY PAIN.

Though written in the form of a serial, this story may be commenced by the reader at any point. Each chapter is complete in itself, and relates an absolutely independent adventure in the career of a penniless but brave and resourceful girl with no one to depend upon but herself. On the death of her father, a clever but shiftless literary ne'er-do-weel, she collects all the little property that is available and boldly sets forth to seek her fortune in London.

We see her struggling tooth and nail against the manifold dangers that beset a friendless girl in such a position, and pluckily surmounting one obstacle after another, never for an instant losing confidence. No more exhilarating example could be put before our readers.

IV.—THE SPIRITS OF HANFORD GARDENS.



BEING still young and passably beautiful I had no wish to become a cynic. But the events of the next fortnight tended to make me so. I reverted to my old idea of making a conquest of some big business, firm in my belief that I had ideas and could make suggestions, and that these were worth money.

I still believe that ideas and suggestions are worth money—pots of money. I also believe that it is extremely difficult to get a guinea for the best of them. I tried an inflated and gigantic shop—one of the stores where you buy everything—and I asked to see the manager. I do not suppose I did see the manager, but I saw someone who was more or less in authority in a back office. There was a clerk at work in that office, and the clerk made me nervous. If I could have rung and had him removed I might have got on better. As I was pretty and well-dressed and did not look poor, and might have called to complain of the quality of the bacon supplied, the managerial person was at first extremely polite, and asked in what way he could serve me.

"I believe," I said, "that this is a business in which new ideas are of value."

"Yes," he said suavely; "in fact, we've already noticed it."

He was still polite; but one could detect a slight shade of irony.

"Well," I said blunderingly, "I am a woman with ideas—heaps of ideas. I have thought about your business particularly, and I am full of suggestions. I believe them to be valuable, but before I hand them over to you I should like to come to some business arrangement—either in

the way of a cash payment or, where practicable, a percentage on profits. In the latter case, of course, I should expect permission to inspect your books and——"

At this moment the clerk, who had been writing at a side-table, with his back to me, went off like a soda-water bottle. I am inclined to think now that for some moments he must have been suffering severely.

"Shut up, or get out!" said the manager to the clerk.

The clerk, being unable to shut up, got out at once. Then the manager turned to me.

"Extraordinary!" he said seriously. "Most extraordinary. And yet you don't look as if you'd been drinking."

Then I got up. "My proposal seems to you very silly," I said. "And, because I was nervous, I put it all very badly. But I do not think that justifies you in behaving like a cad."

He gave a jump in his chair. Being a person in authority, he did not get the chance to hear the plain truth about himself often.

"Nor do I," he said reflectively. "I beg your pardon. Still, the thing was so outrageous. You must see, my dear young lady, that we could not dream for one moment——"

"Thanks," I said. "I won't trouble you any further."

If I had stuck to that man and given him one or two of my ideas in advance, reserving the question of terms, I am not sure that I might not have done something. He would have liked to compensate for his rudeness, if he could have done it. But, being proud, and angry, and an idiot, I walked out. My one idea was to get out of the awful place.

I tried two or three other shops, and began at the right end, but did very little better. One man listened to three of my ideas for Christmas novelties, very politely regretted that he could not avail himself of them, and showed me out. He used two of those ideas subsequently and made money with them—and I hope it may choke him. Another man listened to a still longer list and, while disclaiming any legal liability, offered me five shillings for my trouble.

So, as things were going rather badly, I was particularly glad of the windfall which came to me in connexion with the man behind the door, one of those queer things that cannot happen except in big cities, and which, some day or other, I may relate at length. For the present I will content myself by merely placing the fact on record without going into details. It is part of the fascination of London that every moment of the day and night something more wicked and more strange is happening than one could ever invent.

The windfall, which was of a most tangible description, tempted me to engage some help in the domestic work of my little flat. I cooked admirably, but I did other things less well, and they bored me; so I talked to my baker, a man of genial and mature wisdom, and he said that I couldn't do better than take Minnie Saxe if I could get her. So I set out to engage Minnie Saxe—and in the end Minnie Saxe engaged me.

She was a girl of sixteen, as flat as a board, with a small bun of sand-coloured hair, a mouth like a steel vice, and an eye like a gimlet. Given

the sex and the opportunities, she would have been Napoleon. As it was, she was a manager, given up to managing everything and everybody, including her own weak-kneed father. To see her was to know that she was capable; but I thought I ought to put the usual questions as to previous experience and character. She waved them aside.

"You don't want to trouble about that, Miss. I'm all right. If I say I'll do for you, I will, and you won't 'ave no fault to find. Now, then, what do you do for yerself—I mean for a livin'?"

"Well," I said, "I have some independent means."

"I see—money of yer own."

"Yes; though not much. Then I had thoughts of some business. Lately I've been writing a little—stories for a magazine."

"I see, Miss. Unsettled. Well, church or chapel?"

I fenced with that question discreetly, and she came off it at once to tell me, almost threateningly, that I couldn't have my breakfast before eight. I said that even so late an hour as nine would suit me.

"And what time should I 'ave finished doin' of you up if you didn't breakfast afore nine? That wouldn't do, neither. Well, I shall be there soon after seven. You'll 'ave your breakfast at eight, and I shall go as soon as I'm through with what's wanted. I may look in in the evening again, but that'll be accordin'. And my money will be four shillin' a week. I can but try it."

So I was engaged as mistress to Minnie Saxe, and I am glad to say that I gave satisfaction. On the first morning, just before she went, she asked candidly if there was anything I "wanted done different," and the few suggestions which I made were never forgotten. "And there's just one thing," she said at the door. "If my fawther comes round 'ere subbin'—I mean, wanting a shillin' or two o' my money what's comin'—'e ain't to 'ave nuthink. If 'e says I sent 'im, jest tell 'im 'e's a liar."

"Do you have trouble with your father?"

"Should do, if I took my eye off of 'im. 'E's afride of me."

I could understand that. I tried to say something delicate and sympathetic about the widespread evils of intemperance. Minnie Saxe looked puzzled.

"Watcher mean, Miss? Drink? Why, 'e's a lifelong teetotal. No, it's sweets as 'e can't keep aw'y from—sugar an' choclit, an' pyestry, and ice-creams from the Italyuns. 'E's no better nor a child—mikin' 'isself a laughin'-stock an' wyestin' 'is money. And if I don't give 'im none for such truck, 'e's as cunnin' as a cartload of monkeys about gettin' it. That's why I dropped you that word o' warnin'."

The word of warning was wanted. Her father called a few days later to say that Minnie had asked him to look in on his way back from work to ask the kindness of sixpence in advance as they had friends to supper. He was a fat little man with a round, innocent face, and really looked much younger than his daughter. I lectured him severely, and he made no defence. "I did think that sixpence was a cert," he said sadly. "But there—she don't leave one no chawnst."

I consoled him with a large slice of cake. But unfortunately Minnie

found him in the street in the act of devouring it. "And," she told me, "of course I knowed that kike by sight. And a pretty dressin'-down I give 'im fur 'is cadgin' wyes." He worked for a bookbinder when he could get a job, and was also intermittently a house-painter and a night-watchman.

I got on very well with Minnie. She shopped admirably and got things cheaper and better than I had ever done. Owing to her fine independence of character she was occasionally rude; but there was always a penitential reaction; she did not apologise or even allude to the past, but for a few days she would call me "m'lady," give me more hot water than usual in the morning, and bring every bit of brass in the place to a state of brilliant polish that seemed almost ostentatious. She respected my cooking and despised my story-writing; and I am inclined to think she was right. "You can cook my 'ead off," she said in a complimentary moment; but I never attempted that delicacy. The trouble with my stories was that I had not got my poor dear papa's style, and could not get it. The children in my stories were just as consumptive and just as misunderstood as in his; they forgave their mother, and saved the kitten from drowning, and died young. And the excessively domestic magazine that always accepted him almost always refused me.

I began to get rather nervous. I had given up the notion of capturing some big business by the sheer brilliance of my ideas. I had no business training and no familiarity with the ways of it. I was unproved, and firms would not let me begin at the top to prove me. Perhaps it was not unnatural, though I still feel sure that some of the ideas had lots of money in them, if only I could have found any backing. I did not make anything like enough by story-writing to pay my expenses, and in consequence I was eating up my capital. "Wilhelmina Castel," I said to myself severely, "this cannot go on." I could not hope for a continual supply of windfalls. My hatred of the usual feminine professions, with thirty shillings a week as the top-note and a gradual diminuendo into the workhouse, was as strong as ever. Yet I questioned whether it would not be better for me to spend capital in learning shorthand and type-writing, worm my way into a good business-house as a clerk, and then trust to my intelligence to find or make the opportunities that would ultimately lead to a partnership. I wished I had someone with whom I could talk it over. But what Minnie Saxe said was perfectly true.

"You ain't got no friends, seemingly," said Minnie Saxe.

"Yes, I have, Minnie, but not here. In London I'm playing a lone hand, as they say."

"Well, it ain't right. And I sha'n't be lookin' in We'n'sday night, 'cos I've promised to do up Mrs. Saunders." She always spoke of her employers as if they were parcels.

It is easy enough for a girl who is alone in London to make friends, but in nine cases out of ten they are not friends. The friend is not made, but arrives in the usual formal channels. And when these usual channels are closed, it is perhaps better to do without friends. Yet I had made one or two acquaintances.

One of them was a neat little woman in a brown coat and skirt. We had come across one another while shopping in the North End-road. One day when we were both in the grocer's shop her string-bag collapsed, and I assisted at a rescue of the parcels. She thanked me; she had a musical voice, and spoke well, with a slight American accent. After that we always spoke when we met; it was mostly about the weather, but gradually she told me one or two things about herself. She was married and had no children and wanted none. She liked old houses, and lived in one. "There are plenty of them in Fulham if you know where to look," she added.

On the night that Minnie was "doing up" Mrs. Saunders I dined at a little confectioner's near Walham Green. That is to say, I had a mutton chop, a jam tartlet, and a glass of lemonade there. One took this weird meal in a little place at the back of the shop, just big enough to hold two small tables and the chairs thereof, and decently veiled by a bead curtain from the eye of the curious. I sat waiting for my chop and reading the evening paper when a rattle of the curtain made me look up. In came the little woman in brown. She seemed rather bewildered at seeing me, said "Good-evening," and modestly took her place at the other table. But she had clearly hesitated about it, and I could not seem too unsociable.

"Won't you come and sit here?" I said. "Unless, of course, you are expecting anybody."

"Thanks so much, I'm quite alone. I didn't know—I thought you might be waiting for a friend."

I laughed. "No; I have no friends—in London, at any rate."

"I am sure you have no enemies," she said with conviction.

"I don't think I have. I'm all alone, you see. Do you often come here? It's a quaint little place."

"Not very often. But to-night my husband is out—professionally engaged—he is a Spiritualist, you know. So I let my maid go out too, and locked up the house and came here."

"So your husband is a Spiritualist? That sounds interesting. Does he see visions and make tables jump, and do automatic writing, and all those things?"

"Oh, no! He has been for years a student of Spiritualism. And, of course, he is—as I am—a profound believer in it. He understands the best ways to conduct a séance, and mediums like to work with him for that reason, but he is not a medium himself. I am a medium—at least, I was." She fiddled with a little pepper-pot on the table, turning it round and round. "Oh, I wish I were you!" she said suddenly.

I was astonished. "But why?" I asked.

"Well, the story is no secret if it won't bore you. It's known to many people already. Have you ever heard of Mr. Wentworth Holding?"

"Of course. You mean the financier and millionaire?"

"Yes. Well, he heard of my husband and of his medium Una. I was always known as Una. I have heard it said that these hard men of business are often superstitious. I should put it that they are shrewd

enough to see that there is something beyond them. Mr. Holding wrote to my husband to ask him to find out the future of a certain stock. Now, that money-making kind of question is one which the spirits always dislike. As a rule they refuse to answer, or answer ambiguously. My husband did not expect much, but he gave me the question, and as soon as it was controlled my hand wrote, 'Heavy fall in three days.' My husband telegraphed this at once to Holding. The financier could not quite believe or quite disbelieve. He did not 'bear' the stock, but also he did not buy it—as in his own judgment he had intended to do. The fall took place, and he sent my husband the biggest fee we have ever received and said we should hear from him again."

"But why does all this make you wish you were I?"

"That's soon told. Holding has written again and wishes to engage the services of my husband and his medium exclusively. My husband has warned him that the spirits will not continue to interest themselves in his business, but he says that he does not mind that, and that there are other things that interest him as much as business. The terms he offers are princely. The work would delight us both. And here comes the trouble—from the moment that I answered that question about the stock—perhaps because I answered it—I have lost power. My husband has searched London for a medium to take my place and can find none. Some of them drink, and very many of them cheat, and those who are decent and honest very often fail to get the results. And that is why I wish I were you; for I feel just as sure that you are an excellent medium as I am that you are good and above any kind of trickery. You won't think me impertinent? I've always studied faces, you know."

"But how can I be a medium? I have never done anything of the kind in my life."

"But that does not matter—not in the very least. I am quite sure of what I say. I only wish you had some spare evenings, and wanted to make money, and could help us."

"All my evenings are spare evenings, and I do want to make money. But I fear my help would be worth nothing."

"Come and see, at least." She glanced at her watch. "My husband will be back in a few minutes. We live at 32, Hanford-gardens—quite near here." Perhaps she noticed the look of cautious hesitation on my face. "Or would you rather come later? You might prefer to——"

"No," I said. "I'll come now." I confess that I felt rather curious. I was not in the least a believer in Spiritualism, but I did believe—and do still believe—that things happen for which no known law supplies the explanation.

No. 32, Hanford-gardens was a little box of a place with a small walled garden. It was an old house, and the tiny room into which my new friend brought me was panelled. The panels had been painted a dark green, and the thick noiseless carpet was of the same colour. It struck me, I remember, that they must have given a good price for that carpet. The room was scantily furnished with a square table, a few solid

mahogany chairs, and a couch in the recess by the fireplace. A man sat by the table, and in front of him was what looked like a glass ball—the size of a cricket-ball—resting on a strip of black velvet. He rose as we came in. The light was dim—for the room was lit only by one small shaded lamp in a sconce on the wall—but I could see that he was a gaunt man of forty, hollow-eyed, with a strong blue chin, looking like a tired actor.

I had already given my new acquaintance my name, and learned that she was Mrs. Dentry. She presented her husband, and in a few words explained the situation. He had a pleasant voice, and rather a dreamy, abstracted manner.

"It is very kind of you," he said hesitatingly. "I do not know, of course, if you have a spiritual power, and one meets with many disappointments—as I have already done this evening. Still, one can try."

"My husband," said Mrs. Dentry in explanation, "has been to-night to see a medium who professed to get most wonderful results. So he was no good, Hector?"

"Worse than that. Conjuring tricks—and not even new conjuring tricks."

Then he turned to me with a host of rapid questions, and seemed satisfied with my answers. "We may have no results, but at any rate there will be no trickery." He glanced at his watch. "Unfortunately, I have to go out for half an hour to see a client of mine. But my wife knows what to do—you will be able to make your first experiments without me."

He went out, and presently I heard the front door bang. Mrs. Dentry made me sit at the table and place my hands on it. "Wait," she said, "until you are sure that the spirits are present, and then ask them aloud to raise the table from the floor."

She went over to the other end of the room and turned out the lamp; then she lit a lamp that gave a little blue flicker, by which I could distinguish nothing except the face of Mrs. Dentry standing beside it.

For a few moments nothing happened; then loud raps came from all parts of the room, the pictures rattled on the walls, and a cold wind blew sharply across my face and hands. I was astounded. Mrs. Dentry had not moved from her position at the other end of the room, and I could just see that she was smiling.

"I knew it would be all right," she said softly. "Go on, please."

"If there are spirits here," I said—and somehow the voice hardly sounded like my own—"I ask them to raise this table from the ground."

Very gradually I felt the table—which was fairly solid and heavy—begin to rise. It rose about two feet in the air, and remained suspended. I pressed on it with my hands, and could not force it down. After a moment or two it fell to the ground with a bang and I removed my hands.

"That will do," I said faintly, and Mrs. Dentry struck a match and relit the lamp. Then she and I sat on the sofa and talked. She said that I was wonderful, and must certainly come and help them. If she might mention terms, she knew that her husband would pay a guinea for each

sitting ; at any rate, I must come while the Wentworth Holding business was on. She urged that I owed it to myself to develop my marvellous powers. As she was talking, I heard the click of a key in the front door, and Mr. Dentry entered, his hat and gloves still in his hands.

"Well?" he said eagerly. "Did you get anything?"

"Anything?" said his wife. "Everything. Miss Castel is a really wonderful medium."

We talked on for some time. I would promise them nothing definitely. But I gave them my address, and said that I would probably come once again, at any rate. They were in despair that I would not give them any further assurance, but I was obstinate. I regarded the whole thing with a curious mixture of curiosity and repulsion.

* * * * *

Next morning Mrs. Dentry called to see me. Wentworth Holding was sending a man of science that night to examine into the whole thing ; it was essential that I should be there.

"If I go," I said, "I do not want my name given."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Dentry ; "you will be addressed as Una."

"Then," I said, "Mr. Holding's tame investigator would be made to believe that I was the same medium that foretold the fall of the stock. I don't like that."

"True," said Mrs. Dentry ; "I hadn't thought of that. It doesn't really much matter. But you'd better be called Una all the same ; there's no cheating about it, because you're ever so much better than the original Una."

"I don't think so. This morning, for instance, I tried the automatic writing and got nothing."

"That's because you don't know how to set about it. My husband will show you. I myself failed scores of times at first. But as for the name, that must be just as you wish. You may be quite nameless if you like."

"I should prefer it."

"And please don't make any more experiments without us. If the conditions are not right you will get no results, and in any case you will be tiring yourself. We want you to-night to be as fresh and full of vitality as possible. If you could get an hour's sleep this afternoon it would be all the better."

But I could not sleep that afternoon although I made the attempt. There were things in my interview with Mrs. Dentry that I did not quite like. I began to wish that I had never gone into the business at all.

* * * * *

I kept my appointment at nine that night, and the Dentrys' rather frowsy maid showed me into the room where I had been on the previous evening. Two men in evening dress stood by the fireplace. One was Dentry ; the other was a short, solid-looking man with a closely clipped grey beard. At the table sat an elderly lady in black, with tight lips and a proud disapproving face.

Dentry thanked me for coming and explained that his wife could not be present. "She is, in fact, taking some of my regular work in order that I may be free." The grey-bearded man was introduced to me as Dr. Morning. The elderly lady, to whom I was not presented, was his wife.

"The Doctor and Mrs. Morning are acting for Mr. Wentworth Holding," said Dentry. "They are here to find out whether we cheat. I admit the unfortunate necessity of such an examination, and I may add that I welcome it. How will you begin, Dr. Morning?"

"With the walls."

"Certainly," said Dentry. He changed his position and leaned against one of the panels. The Doctor began with that panel, but neither there nor in the rest of his thorough examination of the room did he seem to come across anything of a suspicious character. This part of the business rather bored me. I wanted to get on and see what would happen.

The Doctor produced several straps with bells attached to them, and Mrs. Morning fastened a couple of these on my hands and wrists. She did this without speaking a word to me, and as she tightened the straps on my wrists she looked as if she wished they had been handcuffs. The Doctor secured Dentry in a similar manner. If either he or I moved hand or foot the sound of the bells would betray us. The Doctor, Dentry, and myself took our seats at the table in the usual way. Mrs. Morning sat at a little distance. All the lights were put out, but there was an unlit candle on a little table beside Mrs. Morning and she held a box of matches ready in her hand.

Almost immediately Dentry asked, in a clear, loud voice: "Is there any spirit here present?" From a far corner of the room came a low snarl as of some wild beast.

"The spirit present," said Dentry, "is an evil spirit. It will be safer not to go on with the sitting."

"We will go on, please," said Dr. Morning.

"Very well," said Dentry. "I disclaim all responsibility."

"Of course," said the Doctor. There was distinctly a note of contempt in his voice.

For a few slow minutes we went on sitting in silence, and then I heard a crash. Mrs. Morning struck a match and lit the candle at her side. I could see that the Doctor had been thrown violently to the ground. "All right, all right," he said to his wife. "I'm not hurt. Let me have a little more light, please."

He remained seated on the carpet while his wife lit the lamp and Dentry stood over him expressing his regret for what had happened. The Doctor took no notice of Dentry. He put on a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles and, as soon as the lamp was lit, put his head down so that his eyes were nearly level with the carpet. Then he got up briskly, brushing the dust from his clothes. "That will do," he said. "We will be going now, and I will call on you, Mr. Dentry, to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, if that suits you."

"Certainly," said Dentry. "Any time you like, Dr. Morning." He

seemed to me to be trying to cover with an attempt at swagger some real uneasiness. He kept on pointing out to the Doctor how severe the test conditions had been.

I was left alone when they had passed out into the hall, but the Doctor came back almost immediately on the plea that he had left his spectacles. He turned to me at once. "Know these people well?" he said.

"No; my acquaintance with Mrs. Dentry was a chance one."

"Done this kind of thing often before?"

"Only once, on the one occasion when I was here before. Mrs. Dentry told me I was a medium."

"She would," said the Doctor grimly. "Well, you're not. You'd better leave it."

"I will."

"I believe," he said meditatively, "you are all right. Good-night." And he held out his hand to me. I followed him into the hall, and I noticed that he did not shake hands with Dentry.

After the Doctor and his wife had gone, Dentry pressed me to wait for a few minutes to see his wife. She would be certain to return in a few minutes.

I refused, and I also refused to let him escort me home. But, as it chanced, I had an escort all the same. For just outside in the street I happened to meet Minnie Saxe.

"I didn't know you went to that place, Miss," said Minnie Saxe severely.

"What's the matter with it?" I asked. And Minnie Saxe told me what was the matter with it.

* * * * *

After breakfast next morning I sat and thought it over. Minnie Saxe and her father had been employed as caretakers at 32, Hanford-gardens. Her father also had been employed to repaint some of the rooms. Thus Minnie Saxe knew that the wainscot in the recess on the left of the fireplace in the front room was removable. It was impossible for anyone in the front room to detect this. On that side it appeared to be tightly nailed and solid. But anyone in the back room could slide a couple of bolts and find a way open into the front room. Also, nobody knew how Mr. and Mrs. Dentry made their money. Also, Mr. Dentry drank. And it was Minnie Saxe's belief that they were engaged in the manufacture of false coin.

It was all quite clear to me now. The Dentrys had required an accomplice. And an accomplice is a very dangerous person. If they could get some simple honest fool, like myself, to believe she was a medium and that she was in reality responsible for the manifestations, all would be safe. The accomplice would not even know that there was any trickery. On the first occasion when I was at Hanford-gardens Mr. Dentry had not left the house. A front door may shut heavily, though no one goes in or out. And I could see that Dentry had brought his hat and gloves into the room instead of leaving them in the hall, with a view to impressing me with the idea that he had not been in the house. Of course he had been in the back

Q

room and had entered by the wainscot. There was a reason doubtless for that thick and noiseless carpet. At the next sitting Mrs. Dentry had simply taken the place of her husband.

I knew that Dr. Morning had discovered the trick, but I could not make out how he had discovered it. He had removed a couch and examined that particular piece of wainscot with the utmost care, and I am sure that he had been perfectly satisfied with it.

In the meantime, what was I to do? Ought I to inform the police, or to write to Mr. Wentworth Holding, or to call on Dr. Morning? Great though my disgust with the Dentrys was, I had a stupid woman's reluctance to get them into serious trouble. As I was thinking over these things there came a tap at my outer door. Minnie Saxe had gone, and I opened the door myself. Mrs. Dentry stood there, looking very nice and fresh and neat.

"Have you just a few minutes to spare?" she said.

I asked her to come in.

"It's such a disappointment," she began. "Dr. Morning was quite satisfied—indeed, under his conditions any trickery would have been impossible. But Mr. Holding has developed religious scruples. He won't go on. So I fear I have no more work of the kind to offer you. In fact, we are leaving for Liverpool to-morrow ourselves. We have heard of an opening there. But I have brought your fee." She began fumbling with her purse.

"I shall not take your money, Mrs. Dentry," I said. "I know exactly how the swindle is worked. Minnie Saxe, who was once employed by you as caretaker, is at present my servant. And she is a very observant and intelligent child. But there are two things I don't understand, and I should like you to explain them."

Beyond the fact that she breathed a little quicker, Mrs. Dentry seemed quite unput-out. "What are your questions?" she asked.

"I have never given you my address. How did you know it?"

"My husband followed you home last night. He was afraid of any communication between you and the Doctor. He did not recognise Minnie Saxe, nor do I think he knows how much she has found out. And the other question?"

"How did Dr. Morning find out? I am sure his examination of the walls of the room told him nothing."

"You are quite right," she said. "It was only at the last moment that he discovered anything."

"You mean that he saw you under the sofa, or that you had not had time to replace the wainscot?"

Mrs. Dentry smiled sadly. "Oh, I'm not quite so clumsy as that," she said. "I was out in the other room and the wainscot was in its place, even before the match was struck."

"You had left something behind you, perhaps—a handkerchief?"

"No; I don't leave things behind me. I wear a dress the colour of the carpet and specially suited for quick, athletic movement. It has no pockets in it. I'm not sure if you'd call it a dress at all. The thing was

simplicity itself. I had warned my husband against it before. The carpet has a long, thick pile. When anybody crawls across a carpet of that kind they leave a trail that it does not take an Indian to discover. Dr. Morning chanced to think of that, and saw that the trail led directly under the sofa. He began this morning by saying to me, 'If you will not let me see the room on the other side of this wall, the whole thing is a swindle, and I shall give Mr. Holding my reasons for thinking so.' I tried to bluster it out. The game was lost, but I might at any rate have managed to put a good face on it. Unfortunately, my husband came in. He'd been drinking. It was too awful, and——"

Here Mrs. Dentry collapsed suddenly and burst into tears.

It is not very easy to be severe with a woman who is crying because her husband is a blackguard and she is a failure. I, at any rate, am not clever enough for it. Before she went she gave me some curious scraps of her personal history. She and her husband had always been, and still were, firm believers in Spiritualism. When she wrote down the fall of the stock about which Mr. Holding was inquiring she was convinced that her hand was really controlled. In order to make a living, though, and to attract the public, more was required than could legitimately be obtained. It was necessary to supplement. This struck me as a nice euphemism.

I gave a sigh of relief when she had gone. I was glad to be quit of that business.

V.—UNREWARDED.

As I have already explained, my adventures with the spiritualists were more interesting than remunerative. I contrasted rather bitterly my light-hearted start upon my career in London and my present condition. It had seemed so simple to forsake the usual futile and ill-paid lines of women's work and to find a new and better way for myself. I had found nothing. It was due more to my luck than my judgment that I was not already at the end of my resources. As it was they were fast dwindling.

Every day I made a point of going out into the stimulating life of crowded London streets. Somewhere in them I felt that I should find my chance. Amid so much that was happening there would be some circumstance that I could use to my profit. I trained myself to observe. Whether it was by day or by night that I had taken my walk I always sat down on my return and reviewed in my mind what I had seen and wondered whether there was anything that I could turn to account.

One morning after breakfast, as I picked up my newspaper, my eye fell on an announcement that a lady had lost a pug-dog, and would pay one guinea for his restoration. It seemed to me queer that I had never thought of this before. Why should I not find things and get rewards? Pug-dogs at a guinea a time did not represent wealth, but there were more serious losses that brought higher rewards. The same paper provided me with an instance. On the evening of the 20th inst., in or near Erciston-square, W., Lady Meskeil had lost a pearl necklace. A description of it was appended, and a reward of four hundred pounds was offered.

I knew Erciston-square very well. It had been rather a favourite place with me in my wanderings. I liked to see the arrivals and depar-

tures at dinners, dances, and receptions. Sometimes great people were pointed out to me.

"That's the Spanish Ambassador," I heard one ragged boy say to another. I have not the least conception how he knew, but I am quite certain he was right. That was at No. 14, and it was to No. 14 that the pearl necklace, if found, was to be restored. It struck me that the reward offered was unusually large. I had seen pearl necklaces in shop windows which could be bought for less. Still, undoubtedly their value might mount to almost any figure.

A paragraph in the paper threw a little more light on the subject. Lady Meskell was a fashionable woman, and was always taking stalls at bazaars or acting in amateur theatricals on behalf of different charities. She affected to treat her loss lightly. "The necklace was not really very valuable," she said, "but I prized it for its associations. It was given me by my husband. On Wednesday night I was walking in the garden of the square, as I often do on fine summer evenings. I believe," she added, "that I am the only resident who makes any use of the garden at all, except perhaps a few children in the afternoon. My necklace must have dropped either in the garden or the street. As soon as I discovered my loss I had the garden—which of course is not accessible to the public—thoroughly searched from end to end, and nothing was found. I'm afraid it must have dropped in the street, where, of course, it would have been snapped up at once." She had communicated with the police and was quite hopeful that the necklace would be recovered. "You see," she added, "I am offering a reward which is really more than a thief would be able to get for it."

There were one or two points about her statements which seemed to me rather curious. I turned up a very rough and abbreviated diary that I was in the habit of keeping, and found, as I had expected, that on the evening of Wednesday, the 20th, I had walked through Erciston-square. The time must have been between six and seven. I lay back in my chair and closed my eyes and conjured up a picture of Erciston-square garden as seen by the public from outside. It was much like any other of the square gardens. Masses of sooty evergreens gave it a decent privacy. Geraniums and blue lobelias struggled for life in a prim bed that skirted a formal and shaven lawn. There were a few big plane-trees, and in the middle of the garden there was a kind of summer-house or shelter. What had I seen in Erciston-square on Wednesday evening which would throw any light on the matter? I had seen something; I had seen somebody leave the garden, and that somebody was most certainly not Lady Meskell. A faint idea came to me—it was hardly a theory as yet.

I went to the public reading-room next day and looked over those papers which purvey fashionable intelligence and personal paragraphs, and as Lady Meskell had been brought into the public eye by the loss of her pearls, I found a good deal about her. Her present age was not given, but she was spoken of as being young. And there were the usual rhapsodies about her beauty. She was of mixed parentage, her mother having been Spanish and her father English. She had inherited fortunes

from both her father and her husband. The latter had been dead about three years, and she had not re-married. She had one daughter, a girl of nine. She was generous, particularly to her favourite charities, and her dramatic abilities were spoken of in terms that the Press does not often spare for amateurs. Well, there was nothing here to contradict the idea that I had already formed. Indeed, there was one detail that confirmed it.

For a week I hesitated. Every day I saw in the paper Lady Meszell's announcement of the reward of four hundred pounds. I wanted those four hundred pounds rather badly. Suppose I called at No. 14, Erciston-square? If my guess was wrong, as it might very easily be, I should make Lady Meszell exceedingly angry. Need that concern me very much? If I were right, then the possibilities were great.

That afternoon I bought a new hat, which suited me. That always gave me courage. And I took a hansom. Nothing keeps one's nerves steadier and raises one's self-respect more than a little extravagance, and I could not afford either the hat or the hansom. I drove to No. 14, and demanded, in a clear and unfaltering voice, if I could see Lady Meszell.

"Her ladyship is not at home," said the butler. And I own that it was some relief to me to hear it.

"Will you tell her ladyship," I said, as I handed him my card, "that I called with reference to her pearl necklace?"

The man hesitated. "It is just possible that I may be mistaken," he said. "If you will wait for one minute, I will enquire."

He showed me into a big, over-furnished and over-decorated drawing-room. As I was looking at rather a nice copy of a well-known Rubens, the door opened and Lady Meszell came towards me.

Lady Meszell was anywhere between thirty-five and forty-five. She was still distinctly beautiful. Her eyes and hair were very dark. Her complexion was perhaps a little too pale, but I liked it. Rouge would not have suited her. Her general appearance seemed to suggest a curious association of poetry and commonness. The commonness was not in her dress, which was very quiet, very expensive, and in the fashion of the day after to-morrow. I think it lay in her mouth (she had a brute of a mouth) and in her rather podgy white hands. Her smile of welcome showed perfect teeth—perhaps was intended to show them. The fat fingers of one hand twisted up my card.

"This is very good of you, Miss Castel," she said at once. "Do sit down and tell me all about it. And first of all, have you got my pearls?"

"No, Lady Meszell," I said, "I have not got them."

Her expression did not change at this. She still listened with an air of polite attention.

"But," I continued, "I have thought over the case and I have formed a theory. If the theory is correct I can tell you where your pearls are."

"How interesting! The police, you know, have been no good at all. I shall be so glad to have some fresh light on the subject, even if it does not actually lead to anything."

I felt convinced that she did not expect me to be able to tell her anything at all, and that, as a kind-hearted woman, she meant to let me babble for a few minutes and then get rid of me.

"On the other hand," I said, "if my theory should happen to be wrong you will be exceedingly angry with me."

Lady Meskell laughed. "Oh, I hope not," she said. "I am very seldom angry, but when I am, I become rather awful."

"The Spanish are privileged to have passions," I said, "and you, I think, are partly Spanish. You begin to frighten me."

Again she laughed. "You needn't be afraid, really. How did you know I was partly Spanish? Oh, yes, it was in the papers, of course. Whatever your theory is, I want to hear it. And I will take all the responsibility of making you tell me it."

"That's very kind of you. Your pearl necklace was not lost at all. It was stolen by a man of about forty. He was wearing a dark suit, a dark-blue overcoat with a velvet collar, and a hard felt hat. He left the Square Garden at five-and-twenty minutes to seven by the gate on the other side of the square. He was a foreigner, and is almost certainly employed in some menial capacity. I cannot tell you his name, but I have no doubt that further information could be obtained at the Spanish Embassy. Although I have brought you here the information which may enable you to recover your necklace, it is information that you had in your possession all along. You know more even than I do, for you know the name of this man."

"This is really very interesting," said Lady Meskell. "You saw this man leave the garden, I suppose?"

"I did."

"And you have remembered it all this time?"

"I have trained myself to remember."

"You are right in your description of his appearance. He is a foreigner, and he is—or was—a servant. What made you suggest that anything could be heard of him at the Spanish Embassy?"

"Your mother was Spanish. The Spanish Ambassador attends your receptions. His carriage was pointed out to me."

"A mistake," said Lady Meskell bluntly. "He has never been here, and I know no Spaniards. Deduction is a dangerous game, and it seems to me that you've been playing it rather freely. You deduced, for instance, that what you said would make me extremely angry. Now, nothing that you have said could possibly make anybody angry. Not even your suggestion of complicity. But I can quite imagine that something which you thought might annoy a woman in my position extremely. Now tell me what you thought."

"I have made a mistake. I am sorry to have troubled you, and I will go now, please."

"Please, don't. You won't tell me?"

I shook my head.

"Then I will tell you," said Lady Meskell. "I will take a hand at this game of deduction and see if I can play it any better than you do."

You knew that my mother was a Spaniard, and you supposed, quite wrongly, that I had some connexion with the Spanish Embassy. Why should a woman in my position meet a man in his position secretly, and in the Square Garden? How could he get into the Square Garden unless I lent him a key? There must be a romance here. Romance fits well with the Spanish blood, doesn't it? Briefly, you scented a love affair. The man had robbed me, and I wanted to get my pearls back. But I did not want the world to hear that story about me." She looked a malicious devil as she was saying all this. "You are quite right," she continued. "I do not want the world to hear any such story. Two hundred and fifty pounds would not be too much to pay for your silence." She took a step or two towards the writing-table. "Shall I write you a cheque?" she said.

By this time I had become rather angry myself. "I don't know," I said, "whether you mean to admit in this way that I had thought correctly; but if you suggest that I had come here to blackmail you, or that you can offer me money in that way——"

Here Lady Meskell, somewhat to my surprise, burst into peals of laughter. She sat down and rubbed her fat hands together cheerfully. "You are a very good girl," she said. "I thought you were from the first. But I was just making sure. No; unromantic though it may seem, there is no liaison between myself and the man—he happens to be a cook—whom you saw leaving the garden. But amid your mistakes you made one or two very happy guesses. It is true that he took my pearls, and that I knew all along he had taken them, and that I knew his name. The advertisement will keep on appearing for the rest of this week. I have my own reasons for that. But as a matter of fact the pearls were returned to me the day before yesterday. I have got them upstairs, and I will show them to you, if you like, before you go."

"They were returned to you by this cook-man?"

"Oh dear, no! That wouldn't have done at all. I can't compound a felony. At any rate, if I do there must be no evidence of it. My friend the cook quite understood that. A nice, ruddy-faced cabman brought the pearls back, and described how his little girl had found them in the gutter, and had supposed them to be beads, and had worn them ever since. He knew it was a lie, and I knew it was a lie, and he knew that I knew. But we went through it all with perfect solemnity. My expert went over the pearls to see that they were all right, and the bank-notes were handed to the cabman. But I think that, as you've been so clever—a little too clever, perhaps—you ought not to be left in the dark as to the rest of the story. I did not want to prosecute, because I did not want to have everybody laughing at me, and they would certainly have laughed. Tell me, did you find out nothing else about me?"

"Two or three other things. You were connected in different ways with several charities. Then, again, you——"

"That'll do. It began with the charities. I came across this good gentleman in hospital. He is an Italian; he has a bright and sunny imagination, and he told me strange stories of streets at the back of

Tottenham Court-road. After demanding a pledge of secrecy he confessed himself to be an Anarchist."

"Then it was romantic, after all?"

"Oh, no; it wasn't. I am sometimes inclined to think that nothing ever is. But I thought it was romantic. I was as bad in that respect as you are. He had something on his mind which he wished to tell me. He was to leave the hospital next day. I could not go to see him nor would it be safe for him to call at my house. I had servants who knew him. He gave me the name of one of them, and quite correctly too. I have no idea how he got hold of it. Would I give him a meeting one evening in the Square Garden? What he had to tell me was a matter of life and death. It was a matter, in fact, that concerned the life of the greatest in the land. He was most urgent and most serious. If it were found out that he had betrayed the plot his own life would be forfeited. I told him that luckily I was in the habit of walking in the Square Garden on fine summer evenings. I am inclined to think that he knew this already. I would go to the summer-house in the middle of the garden, and half an hour later he might join me there, coming in from the other side of the square. Well, he came."

"Wasn't it very rash of you?"

"Very likely. I may be a lot of other things, but I am not a coward. I carried a useful weapon—it was not a dagger or revolver, but merely a police whistle. I was not in the least afraid of him. He kept it up splendidly to the very end. He told me a long and beautiful story, illustrated by plans of Buckingham Palace. The plans looked quite all right, but no woman can understand plans, and my knowledge of the interior of Buckingham Palace is very limited. He accepted ten sovereigns, under protest, to enable him to get out of the country. As I left the summer-house he helped me on with my cloak. That was his opportunity. I did not discover the loss until I got back to my own house. Even then, when I felt certain that he had stolen my necklace, I could not quite bring myself to disbelieve his story. It was so circumstantial, so full of details, so correct in every point in which I was able to check it. I drove at once to Scotland Yard, and it was not till I was actually there that I made up my mind to say nothing about my Italian friend and his story. I dreaded the courteous smile of an inspector who could put his hand at any time on any Anarchist in London. I merely notified them that I had lost the pearl necklace and gave a description of it. I wished to recover it and to let my cook friend go scot free—not on his own account, but because I could not bear that my friends should know what an idiot I had made of myself."

"And what about that servant who knew the Italian?"

"Simplicity itself. He did not know the Italian, nor did the Italian know him. The Italian merely knew that I employed a man of that name. Naturally, one of the first things I did was to satisfy myself on that point. Really, do you know, when I remember how my advertisement was worded, it seems to me that you have earned the reward. Won't you let me write that cheque?"

"Thanks, very much," I said, "but I'm afraid I don't feel as if I've

earned it myself. And so I can't take it. I am sorry to have wasted your time with my mistakes." I held out my hand to say good-bye.

She glanced at the clock nervously. "But you mustn't go yet—not until you have seen the pearls." She rang and had the necklace brought to her. It was just an ordinary necklace, and I could not imagine why she had bothered about it. I admired it, and again said good-bye.

"But you must stay and have some tea with me. I am quite alone, and it would be so kind of you. I want you to tell me all about this marvellous memory of yours. I would give anything if I could cultivate it in myself." Once more she glanced at the clock.

It was quite obvious, for some reason which I could not discover, that she was trying to keep me. I was determined to go. She implored me to wait at any rate until her carriage could be brought round to drive me back. She could not bear to think of the amount of trouble I had taken for her, an entire stranger to me. I might at least let her carriage take me home. But I immediately determined to walk. She still tried one or two frantic excuses for keeping me, but I was firm, and a minute or two later I was outside in the square. I walked round to the other side of it, and there, in the Square Garden, pacing up and down, was a man of about forty, of a foreign appearance, wearing a dark suit, a dark blue overcoat with a velvet collar, and a hard felt hat.

And then I knew what a remarkably clever woman, and at the same time what an absolute fool, Lady Meskell was.

I was one of the few people in London who were not surprised some few weeks later when her marriage with an Italian cook made paragraphs in the papers. She had met him, it was said, in a hospital where she was visiting, and the two had fallen violently in love with one another.

As for the necklace, I have not the least doubt that it was really dropped in the street and really found by the cabman's child, and that the fortunate *chef* had nothing whatever to do with it. It is very wrong, of course, but I own that when I thought of the rapidity, the brilliance, and the convincing character of Lady Meskell's lies to me, I had some feeling of envy. It was only the chance that I decided to go at the time when he was waiting for her in the Square Garden that gave her away to me. I could not have done as well for myself in so tight a place.

(To be continued.)



THE LONE HAND. By BARRY PAIN.

Though written in the form of a serial, this story may be commenced by the reader at any point. Each chapter is complete in itself, and relates an absolutely independent adventure in the career of a penniless but brave and resourceful girl with no one to depend upon but herself. On the death of her father, a clever but shiftless literary ne'er-do-weel, she collects all the little property that is available and boldly sets forth to seek her fortune in London.

We see her struggling tooth and nail against the manifold dangers that beset a friendless girl in such a position, and pluckily surmounting one obstacle after another, never for an instant losing confidence.

No more exhilarating example could be put before our readers.

VI.—A QUEER COMMISSION.

FOR a time things went very badly. My luck was right out. A point was reached when I doubted if I could continue to afford four shillings a week for the quite invaluable services of Minnie Saxe. I was determined that this should be almost the last of my economies. I was quite willing to economise on food and firing, and—yes, even on dress. But I did not want to make my own bed any more. I had to get the more sordid part of the work of living done for me. Naturally I was not anxious that Minnie Saxe should discover the badness of my luck and the lowness of my exchequer. She accepted without comment my statement that I found tea and bread-and-butter the best breakfast if one were going to work in the morning. She said nothing when I found it was more hygienic to work in a cold room. When she came in unexpectedly one night and caught me in the very act of dining on tea and bread-and-butter she became extremely bad-tempered and was rather rude. Next morning she informed me that her cousin at Yarmouth had sent them a present of a box of kippers, and her father had taken the liberty of asking if I would accept six with his best thanks for all my kindness to her. I went into my own room to cry, and then came back and had a kipper for breakfast. They were remarkably good kippers, fat and well-liking.

An exclusive diet of tea and bread-and-butter would perhaps be good for many people, but it does not act as a stimulus to the imagination. The editors at this time sent my work back with commendable promptitude, but I did get one little story placed in *Tomlinson's Magazine*, which I had considered to be altogether too high for me and had only attempted in desperation. I had a mutton chop for dinner the night I received my

cheque, and this gross feeding, acting on an already enfeebled constitution, as they say in the obituaries, led me to believe that I could write just the kind of serial that *Tomlinson's Magazine* would like. I planned it all out that night. Next morning I took a 'bus to the City to see the editor of *Tomlinson's Magazine* and tell him all about my idea.

He consented to see me. He seemed to be a very young man and very tired, and had the fingers of a confirmed cigarette smoker. An older and a fatter man was standing by his side when I was shown in, and was handing him some proof-sheets for inspection.

"Cut out 'A Mother's Prayer,' and fill up with small jokes. Otherwise all right." The fat man went out and the editor turned to me. I began to tell him my business.

"About a serial story!" he said. "All right, send it in and we'll read it." He rose from his chair and glanced at a large, framed notice on the wall. The notice said:

"YOU CAN SAY IT ALL IN FIVE MINUTES."

I followed the glance and looked back at him. "So I can," I said, "and I don't want to waste my time over a long story unless I know that it has, at any rate, a chance."

"Certainly," he said. "Quite natural. The first few chapters and a synopsis will be enough." He was opening the door and shaking hands with me. The fat man was in the passage outside, and he called to him that after all he would let that Mother's Prayer stand. Some people liked a bit of sentimental verse now and then.

I got on a 'bus to go home and felt incompetent and hopeless. I rode on the top, and in front of me sat a well-dressed man, making pencil notes. In Piccadilly he got up, and as he passed me I noticed that he had a strong face, full of character. A moment later I noticed that he had left his pocket-book behind him. I picked it up and dashed after him.

"Pardon," I said, as I handed the book to him, "but you left this on the 'bus." He took off his hat and looked at me keenly, with deep-set, blazing eyes. "Thank you," he said. "My house is quite near, in the square here. I should like to speak to you of this, if you can spare a few minutes."

"I don't want a reward," I said bluntly, "and I don't see what there is to say."

"I never dreamed of offering you a reward." He grinned pleasantly. "You really insult me in supposing that I could have made the blunder. But you have done me a very great service, and I wish you to understand how great it is. I shall wish very probably to speak to you on quite a different matter. We cannot talk here. Come, my name is Wentworth Holding, and only respectable people live in Berkeley-square."

"Very well," I said. "My time, unfortunately, is not valuable. I will come. I know your name, of course. In fact, I once met an agent of yours, a Dr. Morning."

He looked at me sharply. "Were you the honest medium?" he said.

"I was."

"You impressed Dr. Morning and his wife very favourably, especially his wife." I certainly had not thought so at the time. "He couldn't make out how you got mixed up with that crew. You will have to tell me that, for I can't make it out either, and I hate puzzles."

I laughed. "Oh, I'll tell you anything you like about that," I said.

The library of his house was on the ground floor. Every available inch of wall-space was covered with bookshelves, and when I sat down I noticed that the books near me dealt principally with Satanism. He remained standing, opened the pocket-book, and showed me that it contained twenty bank-notes of fifty pounds each.

"These," he said, "are of comparatively little importance. These pages of memoranda are worth more. At any rate, there are people in the City who would have given you a good deal more for them. If you had read them you would have had very little difficulty in finding your market. Don't you think you had better have slipped the book into your pocket and said nothing?"

I hated this kind of thing. "No," I said bluntly. "Why say these things?"

He looked at me long and seriously. "You are," he said, "in many respects exactly like Charles. Charles," he added, "is my son. He is a singularly Quixotic young man, and at present he's in the deuce of a mess."

What on earth was I to say to that? As I did not know, I said nothing.

"May I ask," he said, "if you have any occupation or profession?"

"I write stories which are not accepted. I have tried other things—taking good ideas to a business man, for instance. But I could do nothing with it. My time is my own."

"You live alone?"

"Quite alone."

He walked up and down the room once or twice and then sat down in a chair opposite to me. "Would you have any objection," he said, "to telling me rather more about yourself? I can assure you that I do not ask from idle curiosity and, if you wish it, nothing that you say will be repeated."

"I don't think," I said, "that there are any dark secrets in my life. At the same time, I don't know why I should tell you anything."

"No more do I," he repeated. "Except that I have some delicate work that I want done and that I think you are one of the few people who could do it for me properly."

"That's all right," I said. "I want work. I'll tell you."

I gave him a rapid sketch of what I had done. I noticed at the time that it was still more a sketch of what I had failed to do. He put in a keen question here and there. At the end he turned to me with a smile.

"Now," he said, "I am going to speak to you plainly, Miss Castel. I should imagine that your father was a clever fool."

"He was—but I don't let you say so. You can speak quite plainly about myself."

"Certainly," he said. "We will begin, then, with you. You have a decided taint of the clever fool in your disposition. For the rest, you are a singularly honest lady; you look pretty; you inspire confidence, and you have tact. You are not, perhaps, the most perfect person I could find for the work I wish to have done; but the work presses, and it might take me months to find anyone better. The work concerns my son Charles. Do you know him?"

"No," I said.

"He is, I am sorry to say, a very good young man. He is quixotically good. I get very little amusement out of spending money myself, but I had hoped that my only son would have some gift for it. He has none. He has never from childhood done an extravagant thing. He buys cheap clothes, and, when I get angry in consequence, he tells me that these are not the things which matter. He might marry brilliantly, but he will not. He has decided to marry a poor girl who has worked for her living. I don't mind that in the least, but, if you will pardon me the expression, I am damned if he is going to marry Miss Sibyl Norton."

"What's the matter with her?"

"Matter with her! Haven't I said the name—Sibyl Norton?"

"Yes, but I don't know it."

"You don't want to know it. It's a name that gives itself away. It's obviously not a real name. It's dishonest; it's stagy; it makes the whole room smell of patchouli."

I laughed. "Really," I said, "this is very extravagant. Is that all you've got against her?"

"No. I dislike her type of mind and her personal appearance. She is quite respectable, has failed on the stage, and is as cunning as a cart-load of monkeys. She talks of virtue and she thinks of the main chance. She lives with a tow-coloured aunt, who has less individuality than I ever met in anybody in my life. It is with the greatest possible difficulty in conversation with her that one can manage to remember that she is there at all. To come to business, the work I want you to do is to prevent my son from marrying Miss Sibyl Norton."

"How?"

"Any way you like. That's your affair. When I tell a clerk to get me out a statement he does not say 'How?' He knows how to do it, and he knows that I don't."

I got up to go. "Thanks," I said. "But I don't think I care about this kind of thing."

"Do, for Heaven's sake, sit down! I am quite serious about this. Look here; I'll give you all the help I can. Why do you suppose I had a thousand pounds in my pocket this morning? It is not like a millionaire; it is especially not like me. Often and often I have had to borrow my 'bus fare from the conductor, who knows me, because I have no money whatever in my pocket. I had that money with me this morning because I wanted an argument. A thousand pounds is as good an argument as I know, except more thousands. I had been down to Dingleton's, the private detective's. I meant to go in there and tell them to buy this girl

off. A thousand pounds was to be the first instalment of her price. When I came there I couldn't do it. I couldn't go inside their beastly office. It was too low down on Charles. Their under-bred and under-educated agents would have made some blunder or other, and Charles would never have forgiven me. But I expect the woman is to be bought, and that you will be able to buy her. A discreditable past would be of very little assistance, because Charles is a quixotic fool. The more he learned that she was the last kind of woman a man ought to marry, the more his insensate chivalry would drive him to marry her."

"Why should one be able to buy her off? I presume your only son is your heir?"

"He is, at present. But I can disinherit him to-morrow. That point might be made clear to Miss Norton. I think a woman of her astuteness will find the simplest little sparrow in the hand worth more than an entire aviary of humming-birds in their native freedom."

"I don't know your son, and I don't know her."

"You will meet my son at lunch here to-day. You can meet Miss Sibyl Norton whenever you like. For, at present, she is getting a precarious existence as a palmist and manicurist. Pretty combination, isn't it?—takes the mystery out of your hand first and then cuts your nails."

"Very well," I said. "I am going to see these two people. Afterwards, I will tell you if I can do anything."

I lunched at the house that day. There were about twenty at the luncheon party, and my clothes were all wrong for it and I did not care a bit. I had some talk with Mr. Charles Holding, and found that he answered fairly well to his father's description. He was noble, but vacuous. A weak chin spoiled a face that would otherwise have been good-looking. I would have trusted him better in temptation than in a street riot. He had a great admiration for Lovelace and was horrified that I did not even possess a copy of his favourite poems. Would I permit him to send me one? I would. He scribbled my address on his shirt-cuff.

I got away from the house about three in the afternoon. Mr. Wentworth Holding himself came down the steps with me, apologising for not being able to let me have his carriage. "You see," he said, "you must, of course, go on to Miss Sibyl Norton at once, and she knows my horses and liveries."

I had not intended to go at once. I wanted to get home and think over this extraordinary commission more at my leisure. But, after all, it did not much matter. A hansom took me to Miss Norton's dingy lodgings in Northumberland-street. The tow-coloured aunt received me in a dusty room, and asked whether it was manicure or palmistry. "Both," I said.

"Miss Norton's fee is one guinea, payable in advance, please. I will give you a receipt." Then she faded out of the room, saying that Miss Norton would be down in a minute.

Miss Norton was down in a minute. She wore a theatrical tea-gown, had a certain amount of pinched prettiness in her face, and seemed to be a fairly hard case. I talked to her the whole time that she was polishing

my nails. When it came to the other section of her weird business, I asked her if she could tell me anything of the future.

"The law does not permit me to do that," she said. "But I can tell you two things about the present which may rather surprise you."

"What are they?" I asked.

"The first is," she said, as she peered more closely into the lines of my hand, "that you have come here with the intention, sooner or later, of bribing me to give up the man to whom I am at present engaged. The second is, that you will have no success whatever in the attempt." She broke off laughing. "I did not read that in your hand, of course. I saw you in Berkeley-square conversing earnestly with Mr. Wentworth Holding this morning. The rest was easy enough to guess. Charles told me I might expect something of the kind."

I tried to keep my composure and my dignity, but I do not think I made a very fine figure. "Perhaps you will tell me," I said quietly, "why you would refuse?"

"I will tell you, but you won't believe it. Money has nothing whatever to do with the matter. If Mr. Charles Holding were a pauper, it would be all the same to me. If it were necessary, I could earn enough by this nonsense to keep us both."

"Well," I said, "let us get on to something more interesting to me personally. Will you go on reading my hand, please?"

She took her revenge by giving me a remarkably bad character.

I took a hansom back to my rooms. "Take cabs everywhere when you are on my business," Mr. Holding had said, though he seemed to prefer the 'bus himself. The bothering thing was that everybody was quite right. Mr. Holding had not exaggerated the bad points of Miss Norton's character or the weaknesses of his son. But Miss Norton, dishonest money-grubber though she was, was perfectly sincere in her attachment to Charles Holding and was not to be influenced by money in that particular. The position was impossible of solution, and I decided that I had nothing to do but to call on Mr. Wentworth Holding on the following day and tell him so.

I did not find the volume of poems awaiting me, and had not expected to find it; but there was a letter in my letter-box which began by explaining why it had not arrived. Mr. Charles Holding had wished to have it put into a rather more suitable dress before it was presented to me. His letter went on to say that his meeting with me had been a revelation to him. It had compelled him to break off his engagement. It was not a time to hesitate. Whatever might be the attractions of the woman whom he had once meant to marry, she had not the high ideals, the quixotic spirit, the chivalrous devotion to all that is best, which he had found in me. (Naturally, in talking to him, I had humoured him a little in what I knew to be his bent. I even saw that I had made some impression on him, but this was too astounding.) The letter went on in rather enraptured terms to speak of the loveliness of my hair, and to propose marriage to me.

So the game had, of its own accord, dropped neatly into my hand. I

refused Mr. Charles Holding in writing, and immediately by the same post transmitted to his father Charles Holding's letter to me. The queer thing about the whole business in the eyes of Mr. Wentworth Holding was that Miss Sibyl Norton did not bring an action for breach of promise and scornfully refused the extremely handsome solatium which was suggested to her. But this did not surprise me.

I had to show a certain amount of conscience myself, or I should have been made rich and unhappy, for Mr. Wentworth Holding's gratitude was extreme. Even as it was, I was enabled to feel myself out of all danger of such privations as I had recently suffered for the next year or two.

VII.—THE PEGASUS CAR.

Extreme poverty and a low diet are not in themselves attractive, but in some ways I was happier in my low-water period than I was now with enough money banked to keep me in moderate comfort for a couple of years. I might be more satisfied with my circumstances, but I now had leisure to become profoundly dissatisfied with myself. I had come to London to play a lone hand and do well by it. I was not going into any of the ruts. I would not become a governess. I had brilliant ideas and enterprise and all the rest of the bag of tricks to make a millionairess of me, yet I had only made few and comparatively small sums by my wits, the rest had been pure luck, or—and this seemed more degrading still—had come to me more because of the outside of my head than of the inside. On my arrival in London I did extremely well, merely from the fact that there was a chance resemblance between a girl who was dead and myself. My success in the strange commission that Mr. Wentworth Holding gave me had not been due in the least to my cleverness, but to the fact that I was pretty. I had been outwitted by a fraudulent spiritualist and by a romantic lady of title. My attempts at literature had been practically failures. When I had taken my bright ideas to business men they had either ridiculed me or robbed me. So, on a general review of the case, I did not think as well of myself as I had done. Self-disapproval is not only very unpleasant but it is positively bad for one. It takes away one's spirit; it checks one's invention. I determined to make a serious and sober effort to recover my own esteem and incidentally to make a little money.

I looked round for a point from which to start, and after a great deal of consideration I noted as a very useful fact that new motor-cars sold for very high prices. A person who could influence the sale of motor-cars would be likely to make a good commission. In the old days, after this brief reflection I should have put on a cheerful smile and my best hat and gone round to one of the big places in Long-acre to explain that I should like to sell cars for them, and the manager of that place, having discovered in twenty seconds that I knew nothing whatever about motor-cars, had no influential connection, and was about as likely to sell a motor-car as I was to sell the moon, would have shown me out—quite politely, because I happened to be pretty.

So I began in a different way. I went out and bought dark blue

linen—many yards of it—and came back and consulted with Minnie Saxe on the manufacture of a garment. Ultimately it was manufactured, and I have seldom seen anyone look more pained and distressed than Minnie Saxe did when I put the abomination on.

"I can't let you go out in that, miss," she said. "You'd 'ave all the boys in the place callin' after you, and that brings disgrace on me, it being known as I work for you."

"That's all right, Minnie," I said. "I'm not going to wear it in the street."

So far I had not gone outside my own province and had moved with comparative ease. My next step had to be more circumspect, for I was about to attack the business man once more.

There are many cars, and at that time they were all the same to me. I read the motoring news in the daily papers assiduously for a week, and then I thought that I would try the Pegasus people. The Pegasus car had just done some remarkable trials; it had one or two novelties in construction; it had not an immense reputation already, but it seemed to have the chance of making one.

So one afternoon I put on gorgeous apparel and walked into the showroom of the Pegasus people looking exactly as if I were about to buy a car. I even felt a little like it too. A tall, handsome man in a frock coat and a powerful little fellow in a dirty overall removed their attention from a car's duodenum as I approached. The handsome man came forward. The powerful squat man remained by the car; he still seemed busy with its vermiform appendix, but he was listening all the time.

"I want," I said, "to learn how to drive the Pegasus car. I want also to learn a good deal about the interior of the car so that I can do adjustments and slight repairs. And I want to learn everything about tyres."

There was just a flicker of a smile over the handsome man's face, but in a moment he had stowed it away at the back of his head and was asking me suavely if I wished to buy a car.

"No," I said boldly. "Not at all. I could not afford it. I have not the money. Buy a car? I'm more likely to sell one. All I want at present is to understand the car thoroughly and to know how to drive it."

The handsome man hesitated. The man in the dirty overall lifted up a bit of the car's femoral artery, looked at it, and then gave his undivided attention to the handsome man and myself.

"I should, of course, be prepared to pay," I added.

"Yes, of course, miss," said the handsome man, "but you see—well, so much of the work is hardly suited for a lady. Some of it requires a good deal of muscular strength. Then, if I may mention it, you would spoil your hands. Then, again, you would hardly like to work in our repairing shop among the ordinary workmen who are there. There really are many difficulties. Hadn't you better think it over, perhaps?"

"Marshall!" It was the voice of the powerful man in the dirty overall. It was a loud voice and packed full of authority.

"Yes, sir," said the handsome man in the frock coat.

"You will arrange that. See? Do the best you can for the lady."

Then he wandered away through a glazed door which seemed to lead to outer darkness, carrying tenderly in one hand one of the car's vertebræ.

I had been imagining all this time that the frock coat was the supreme manager and general god of the place, and that the dirty overall was a mere workman. I now saw that this was not the case.

"Well, miss," said Mr. Marshall, "we can but try it, as Mr. James says so. You will have to get something to cover up your clothes if you don't want to spoil them."

"I have got that already," I said. "I don't want to work many hours a day. Two or three in the morning would be quite enough. I suppose I could not begin by driving?"

"No," said Mr. Marshall. "You would begin by trying to understand the car; then, of course, the rest would depend upon how you got on." There was no hope in his face whatever.

Nothing remained but to settle the terms, and here it seemed to me that Mr. Marshall was very reasonable and lenient. But the man to whom I should have liked to talk was Mr. James, and he did not appear again that morning.

A very few days were enough to show me that there was a good deal to be said for Mr. Marshall's point of view. I had expected to get my hands covered with black oil, and I was not in the least disappointed. I did not like breaking my nails, but that happened also. It takes more force than a woman generally uses to take a tyre off or to screw a thing up really tight. The workmen in the place were all decent, intelligent mechanics, a little inclined to be amused at me at first, but they concealed their amusement, having the fear of Mr. James before their eyes. I saw him several times in the course of my lessons. He could do anything that had to be done in the shop rather better than anybody else in it.

At the end of a month I was still learning my business. One morning as I was leaving Mr. James stood outside with one of the big Pegasus cars in waiting. The overall had vanished. He looked smart, clean, and indefinitely connected with his Majesty's Navy.

"If you have an hour to spare, Miss Castel, I want you to begin to learn how to drive these cars."

"Thanks very much," I said. "I should like it. Who'll teach me?"

"I shall," said Mr. James. "Now, if you'll get in, please——"

I rather despised his style of driving then. He was particularly careful; slowed down round every corner, did not exceed the speed limit, did not take narrow shaves. He made the car go fast up hill and steadied her coming down. He was an excellent driver, really; a driver with great knowledge and good nerve, and without any of the vain idiot's desire to show off.

Some weeks afterwards, when my motor education was nearing its completion, Mr. James asked me suddenly one day what I was doing it

for. "Do you mean to get a post as driver?" he asked. "You could, you know. We could fairly recommend you, and I daresay some ladies would prefer to have a lady driver."

"No," I said, "that was not my idea. My idea was to work for your firm when you think I am good enough."

"You drive all right. I'll guarantee you know a lot more about the car than a good many men do who are driving it about the country at present. But what was it that you are proposing to do for us?"

"I am proposing to show cars for you. The fact is that your car looks a little bit complicated at first. If an intending purchaser found that a young girl understood it and drove it easily he would be reassured."

"Yes," said Mr. James reflectively. "I'd thought of that. There's something in it, perhaps."

He seemed to be debating the matter with himself in silence for a few moments; then he said: "Look here. I've got a man coming up to-morrow. He may buy a Pegasus, or he may buy some other car. Anyhow, he's going to buy a car, and we should prefer that he bought a Pegasus. He's a nervous kind of man, and my first idea was that in order to make him feel quite secure I would drive him myself. Now I'll change my mind. He'd be more impressed if I sent the car out with a girl. If you sell the car to him we will pay you a small commission. Remember he's a nervous man. You don't want to show him how fast the car can go. Show him how handy it is in a block or very slow traffic; the ease with which it is steered; the quietness of the engines; the impossibility of skid."

"Yes, yes," I said. "I see all that. I shall sell him that car."

I was round next morning at eleven. The possible purchaser was an elderly solicitor, retired from practice, who, after long searchings of heart, had decided that he would have a motor-car. He looked dubiously at the big Pegasus waiting to take him his trial trip as if he expected that it might go off any moment. He was a good deal startled when he was told that I should drive him.

"Is that all right?" I heard him ask Mr. James.

"I am sending you out," said Mr. James, "with one of the best drivers we've got."

I got up, switched on the spark, and the engines started.

"Dear me," said Mr. Hoskins, "I was always under the impression that it was necessary to wind it up—to turn a handle."

"So it would be," I said, "if the car had been standing for a long time, or on a very cold day; but a good four-cylinder car will generally start with switching on the spark."

"You are a careful driver, I hope," he said, as I took him through Piccadilly-circus.

"Yes, I think so," I said; "but then this car is particularly easy to manage."

His nervousness wore off as we got further away from London. He desired me ardently to show him the utmost the car could do. As it could

do fifty miles an hour and we were in a police-trapped country at the time I refrained, but I showed him what it was to have plenty of power in going up steep hills. The car made nothing of them. He became silent as we drove back, and I did not bother him by chattering. Just as we were nearing home he said, "I like this car. It goes well, and there can be no great difficulty about it if a girl can drive it. I shall buy it."

He did not buy that particular car. He got one like it, and we tuned it up for him and found him a driver. He was in great trouble about myself. If one of the ordinary drivers had taken him he would have tipped the man, but he felt that he could not tip me, although he could see that I was an employed person. He sent me a charming letter of thanks and a very good motor rug. And I got my commission. Better still, I had now got back my self-respect.

After this I often drove for Mr. James when he wanted to show a car. Naturally, I did not always find a purchaser, but on the whole I was fairly successful. Mr. James himself seemed to think that I had unusually good luck. I did not in the least mind what work I did. I was there one morning when Mr. Marshall had just opened a telegram. It was from a young man living in Bedford who had bought one of the cars, which had been delivered the day before. The car had been driven to Bedford by one of Mr. James's mechanics. It had already been run for a hundred miles and properly tuned up, and the mechanic had had no trouble of any sort with it. The telegram said: "Engines will not start. Please send man."

"We can't," said Marshall.

Mr. James reflected. It was a very busy time, and everybody on the place was fully engaged. "It can't be anything serious," said Mr. James. "It's some fool thing or other that he's done."

Then I volunteered. "I'll go if you like," I said.

"Really?" said Mr. James. "It would be awfully good of you if you would. Will you go by train or drive yourself down?"

I decided to go by train. At Bedford I took a cab to the house, and told the butler who answered the door that I had called about the car. He looked a little puzzled and showed me into the drawing-room. I was wearing my most enchanting clothes. I had put them on with intent for the fun of the thing, but I had brought my overall with me in case of need. A puzzled and sweet-looking young lady came into the room, said "Good morning," and shook hands; and then, "Am I right? I understand you have called about my husband's car?"

"Yes," I said. "He wired to the Pegasus people for an engineer to be sent. I am the engineer."

She seemed considerably staggered. "Do you mean this? Really? You an engineer?"

"Yes," I said. "Do you mind?" It was rather cheeky.

Then she found her husband for me, a fluffy, enthusiastic young man, weary and dirty with long wrestling with that car's interior. I went with him to the shed and looked it over.

There was perhaps one teaspoonful of petrol in the tank. I pointed

out to him that petrol cars went better when petrol was used. We then filled up the tank and started. I think I never saw anyone so absolutely abject. What he wanted to do and did not dare to do was to ask me not to reveal the nature of the trouble to the firm when I got back. He needn't have minded. To the firm it was all in the day's work. And the curious thing was that the young man was by no means a fool in mechanical matters; it was simply that he had not happened to think of the petrol.

I got along very well now. I might have saved myself a good deal of trouble if I had started on this business at once. I was now making an income which justified me, I thought, in removing from my little flat to something better and nearer to the middle of civilisation. It was Minnie Saxe who decided it for me. She lingered one morning after she had brought my breakfast; not lachrymose—for she never wept—but stern and depressed.

"I am afraid I shall have to leave you, miss," she said.

"I'm sorry," I said. "Why?"

"Well, father's broken down again. These last three weeks he's brought back his money a shilling short and great paper bags of almond-rock in his pocket. Nothing I can say seems to be able to save him."

I did not smile outwardly. "Well, what are you going to do about it, Minnie?"

"I am going to do what I ought to have done long ago. He's got a bit of money put by, and I know where there's a good opening. I'm going into the sweets and general."

"What!" I said. "Going to sell sweets? But your father will eat the stock."

"That's just it," said Minnie. "What's more, he'll be encouraged to eat it. What's more, when he's finished he'll be made to go on again. He'll get that and nothing else for a week, and if he can look sugar in the face at the end of it I'm a Dutchman. Him a grown man, too! I could find another girl to do you up, miss, I think, though I won't say that she'd be quite my class. Still, I would have her here the week before I left, and if anybody can knock a thing into a girl's head I think I can."

I explained to Minnie that she need not trouble and that I should move from the neighbourhood.

Some time later I made a point of visiting Miss Saxe's emporium. I was served by her father, who looked distinctly chastened and rather thinner. He told me that his daughter was a wonderful girl, and I believed him. He waved one hand over the assorted boxes on the counter. "I never touch anything of this kind now," he said. "One loses one's taste for it as one gets older." So Mr. Saxe was happily reclaimed.

The Pegasus people began now to manufacture a light, cheap 6½-h.p. runabout car. It was entered for a reliability trial, and Mr. James told me that I was to drive it. I was nearly off my head with joy over that. Subsequently I nearly broke my heart over it. I'll tell the story as briefly as possible. I had already tried the car thoroughly myself and did not know of anything in the same class to touch it. I was not the least

nervous ; indeed, now I come to think of it, I believe I have never been nervous. The first day it did splendidly, and we were more than a minute ahead of everything up Onslow Hill. The second day the car broke down, and Mr. James and myself were unable to find what was wrong and put it right again within the time-limit. Nothing but the turn of a screw was required, and a few minutes later we were ready to start, but our chance was gone as far as that trial was concerned. Mr. James got a couple of Pressmen whom he knew to get up on the car, and we had a little private demonstration. One of the Pressmen afterwards wrote on the question as to whether reliability trials really proved reliability. I did not talk much during our run; I was too much upset by the failure of the car.

As soon as I could I got back to the muggy little hotel. Mr. James came in there and asked for me, and I went down to see him.

"What have you been crying for?" he said sharply.

"Nothing," I said; which is what an ass of a woman would say.

"It wasn't your fault," he went on. "It was my fault for sleeping in a bedroom. The next time I go in for one of these things I'll sleep on my car. That needle-valve never went wrong by itself. Prove it? Of course I can't prove it. But I know it, though I am going to say nothing about it."

So far we had been standing up. He then sat down, and immediately and in rather a dictatorial way asked me if I would marry him.

I told him that I would not. He could do all these things without appearing in the least to be a fool. It was I and not he who seemed to be humiliated when I refused him.

I left the service of the Pegasus people in consequence. Mr. James thought it would be better, and had no doubt whatever that he could find me another post. So these external personal qualities which had brought me fortune before now cut off, for the time, at least, the profitable employment which I had found for myself by sheer hard work and common-sense.

I sometimes thought at this time that if there were no men in the world women would get on a good deal better.

VIII.—A LOSS AND A GAIN.

Shortly after the events which I last narrated I happened one sunny morning to be walking down Oxford-street. I had just come back from an interview with a firm of motor manufacturers. They had made me an offer, and I had refused it. As I was walking along I found myself touched on the arm by a girl of about my own age. She was extremely well dressed—much better dressed than I was; and in appearance she was not altogether unlike me except for two points—she was exceedingly pale, and her expression was one of acute anxiety.

"Will you help me?" she said.

It was impossible to suppose that she was a beggar. The idea that she was insane flashed across me for a moment; then I noted her extreme pallor and thought that she might be ill. I am not quite inhuman.

"Yes," I said. "I will help you if I can. What is the matter?"

"I have lost my memory," she said. "It has all gone suddenly and absolutely. I do not know what my name is or where I am. I am very reluctant to apply to the police—it means so much publicity. It would be horrible to me. If you could take me somewhere where I could rest for a little time I think my memory would come back again. I hope so. I can't tell you how grateful I should be to you."

"What made you ask me?"

"Because you looked so nice," she said simply. "A long stream of people went past me and at first they confused me very much; then I began looking at faces. I looked for a long time, and yours was the first I could trust. If you would take me with you I would not give you more trouble than I could help, and I would do everything I was told. I—I believe there is some money in the bag I have here."

"That is not a very important point," I said.

"I don't know. I think I must have money. I think I must always have had it. I have been looking at my clothes, and they seem to me to be very good."

"So they are," I said.

She smiled faintly. "It seems so queer to be talking to a strange like this; only you see I don't know what to do. I don't know how I came here or where I am to go."

I liked the girl. "At present," I said, "you will come with me to my flat and have some luncheon. If your memory doesn't come back then you can stay there for the present. I have a spare room, and will make you quite comfortable. I live alone. Then to-morrow, if your memory has not returned, we can talk about it and decide what is best to do. You must have friends. They will almost certainly advertise for you."

"Thank you. Thank you so much. I feel quite safe now that I have met you. A few moments ago I was frightened out of my life. How long will it take us to walk to your flat?"

"I don't know," I said, "and in all probability I never shall." I stopped a four-wheeler that was crawling past us. The girl was obviously too tired and ill to walk. "Won't you get in?" I said.

She got in and leaned back. "I feel utterly worn out," she said. "I shall have to wait a little before I can tell you how much I thank you."

"Come," I said. "You musn't be silly. After all, we are both human beings. Don't look on an act of ordinary decency as if it were unparalleled heroism."

Again came that ghost of a smile. I could see that she and I would laugh at the same things, which is in itself a bond of union. She talked no more until we were nearing Hensley-mansions. When the cab stopped she was quite wide-awake and alert, but although she was sitting next the door she did not attempt to open it.

I noted that. The conscious mind could remember nothing, but the sub-conscious mind was remembering absolutely. She was a girl whose carriage-door was opened for her.

It was really delightful to see the change which came over her when she got into my flat. "Now at last I feel safe," she said, and drew a deep breath. "Don't let me go out again. Don't leave me alone if you can help it. I'm quite all right, really; it's only that I feel terribly pulled down, and for the moment some of myself is not in my keeping. I'm sure it will come back. I shall remember directly." Suddenly she stopped and seized my hand and kissed it. I told her not to be an idiot, and we both laughed. She absolutely refused to go to bed. She said, "I have had too much of that," without seeming to know the meaning of the words she used. At this time my flat was run by a good woman who was an excellent cook. She was also a widow, but that did not matter so much. I explained to Mrs. Mason as far as I could do so discreetly the state of affairs, and she at once became intensely interested. She also became slightly disapproving. She let me see clearly that she considered that I had not done enough. My suggestions as to luncheon were waived aside imperiously. "Leave it to me, miss," said Mrs. Mason. "I know what illness is. I shouldn't wish to seem to boast, but there are few families has had as much illness as mine has. Leave it to me."

So my new friend—if one must condescend to details—received quintessential soup, roast chicken, and a milk-pudding. As Mrs. Mason knows, if there is one thing I hate more than another it is milk-pudding, but very little she cared.

As we sat down to luncheon my friend said suddenly, "I have forgotten my medicine."

Here was a clue. I tried to show no absorbing interest and to ask quite casually, "What medicine do you mean?"

The look of pained anxiety which had quite left her face now came back again. "What medicine do I mean?" she repeated. "There was something—always—before luncheon. Please, don't ask me any questions. It's no good. I can't remember, and it makes me so wretched." She seemed to be on the verge of tears. I asked her no more questions, and I felt like a perfect pig for having asked her that one, but I had the usual fool-consolation that I had acted for the best. I could not find out that there was anything wrong with her mind. Distinctly she had a humorous side. She could see all that was quaint in Mrs. Mason, and asked numberless questions about her. She was not in the least surprised when I told her that I was an engineer. "Almost everybody's something nowadays," she remarked, and I was quite certain that it was not her own remark; it was an echo which her sub-conscious mind had caught up from the time before she lost her memory, and had now reproduced at the call of a fitting occasion. But of whatever subject we spoke she always came back to the same thing. It was always, "I am safe now. I'm quite safe. I needn't bother any more. It will come right. Oh, you are good to me!"

I made her drink one glass of port at luncheon, and I made her sleep afterwards. At first she hesitated, but I told her that I was not going out—that I should be in the next room all the time. Then she consented. This was a crucial test with me. I went into her room twice, and found

her fast asleep. It would not have surprised me if, when she woke again, she had entirely failed to remember me or the circumstances which had led to her making my acquaintance. On the contrary, she remembered me perfectly. The only curious thing that struck me at tea-time was that she called me Rose at times. "Thanks awfully, Rose," she would say when I passed her anything.

It was on the tip of my tongue to ask her why she called me Rose, but the other question which I had put to her had been disastrous, and I refrained. After tea she put her head in her hands and said she was going to think hard, and it would all come back. She made me renew a promise that I would not go to the police. I think she struggled in this way for about an hour, and then she flung herself back in her chair and burst into tears. I consoled her as well as I could, and by dinner-time she was quite herself again; there was even a touch of colour in her face. She talked well; I think even it would have been said that she talked brilliantly. There was nothing apparently wrong with her but her lapse of memory.

After dinner I said to her, "I have sent for my doctor. He's quite a nice old man, and you won't mind him a bit. I have not told him that you have lost your memory, and I shall not tell him so. Perhaps he will be able to give you something that is good for you."

Doctor Morning (whose acquaintance I had continued) came and saw my friend, and saw me afterwards. I gave him no information and no lead.

"Well?" I said.

"Yes, Miss Castel," said the doctor. "Your friend—by the way, you forgot to give me her name—is extremely anæmic. She is recovering from a severe illness. She has had diphtheria badly. Let her rest and feed her up, and don't let her worry. She seems inclined to worry about something or other. I'll send something round for her directly."

After the doctor had gone I found from my friend that she had been perplexed by some of his questions. She hoped that she had answered rightly—that he had suspected nothing. I recalled the faintest possible twinkle in Doctor Morning's eye as he told me that I had forgotten to give him my friend's name. I wished now that I had made a clean breast of it. He was probably aware, anyhow, that he was dealing with a quite interesting case of amnesia.

The whole thing came out as my friend was going to bed. I had gone to her room with her, and as she was saying good-night she suddenly observed, "But I don't know your name. It's ridiculous. I never asked you. Do tell me what your name is."

"I'm Miss Castel—Wilhelmina Castel."

She clasped her hands impulsively together and then pressed them over her eyes.

"Wait!" she cried. "Wait! It's all coming back. You cannot be Miss Castel. I'm Miss Castel—Cynthia Castel. I remember it distinctly. I remember Marley Court, and my sweet nurse Rose. Yes, I remember everything."

I laughed. "It's all quite simple," I said. "Marley Court is where my grandfather lives. He quarrelled with my father—you may have heard him speak of it. You are a daughter of my father's younger brother. I heard of you as a baby once in days long back. We are first cousins. Isn't it ridiculous and melodramatic?"

After that there was a long hour's talk. My cousin's memory had come back as suddenly as it had gone. This, I was told afterwards, is not unusual. She could tell me a good deal about my grandfather. One sentence stuck in my memory. "He's not violent any more." Cynthia had lived with him since her parents' death. I was calling her Cynthia before the end of that hour's talk, when I reproached myself for keeping her awake too long and insisted on leaving her. Her joy at recovering her memory was pathetic, and her intense gratitude to myself was absurd.

"Suppose," she said, "that I had not asked you for your name?"

"Well," I said, "aren't your things marked?"

She shook her head. "Only initials."

"And the bag?" I asked.

We hunted up the bag. It contained the return half of her ticket, a handkerchief, and a purse with four shillings and sixpence in it, but nothing by which I could certainly have identified her. She could remember now why she had come to London; it was an old and unimportant engagement with a dressmaker. It had been cancelled in consequence of her health. She could not remember going to the station. From that point until she met me everything was like a forgotten dream.

There were advertisements in every paper next morning—discreet advertisements with no name given. I put her into the train and spoke to the guard about her. I might have travelled with her, but I did not wish to meet Grandpapa. I had not forgotten the letter he wrote to me when my father died.

I did meet him in the end. One has to forgive one's own flesh and blood. The letter which he sent to me was pathetic in its senile shakiness and absolutely right. He could not begin to thank me, so he said, for what I had done for Cynthia; all he wanted was to say he was sorry and ashamed. He would have liked to be friends with me before he died, but he supposed that was impossible. He would have liked also to have been of service to me, but from what he heard I no longer needed his help, and was too proud to take it in any case. "Otherwise I should have liked a chance to have made up to you a very little for my obstinate cruelty to your father."

The letter touched me, and I am an impulsive person. I sent a telegram, and followed it.

Cynthia met me at the station, driving a fat pony in a governess cart, and very much inclined to cry when she saw me. I met my grandfather, who was very vague and grey, and shrunk, and sad. We became friends at once. I met Rose, the woman who had nursed Cynthia, and Rose said that I had supplanted her, and she would call me out. She was quite charming. Many people were staying at the house—amongst others I met—

Let me get it over quickly, for the one thing that I will not tell is my love-story. It was very brief and tempestuous. In a few months I was playing with the lone hand no longer. I, with all my independence and all my common-sense, fell hopelessly in love, and acknowledged in white satin, Honiton lace, and orange blossom that I was a woman after all. Well, one might be worse things. One of the most expensive of my wedding presents came from Mr. James. The 36-h.p. Pegasus car is of importance. I taught my husband to drive it.

POSTSCRIPT.

I have been looking at these pages over again. I wrote them at the time when the things happened, and that is years ago ; yet they all seem but yesterday. It seems but yesterday that Minnie Saxe brought to me, in the days of my extreme poverty and hunger, six kippers, fat and well-liking. It seems but yesterday that I stepped out on the platform at Charing Cross Station and drove from there with a man whom I had never met in my life in order that I might personate a dead woman. And now ?

And now, right away in the country, it is all very quiet but for the voices of two small children overhead. Even as I write this I am interrupted by a grave man of imperturbable mien—a man who may possibly have seen a joke in the servants' hall, but has never permitted himself to see one outside of it. He announces with the utmost solemnity, " Master Bernard desired me to say, m'lady, that the head of the toy duck has come off, and he would be glad if your ladyship would step upstairs and see about it."

" Thanks, Jenkins," I said. " Tell him I'm coming."

THE END.

